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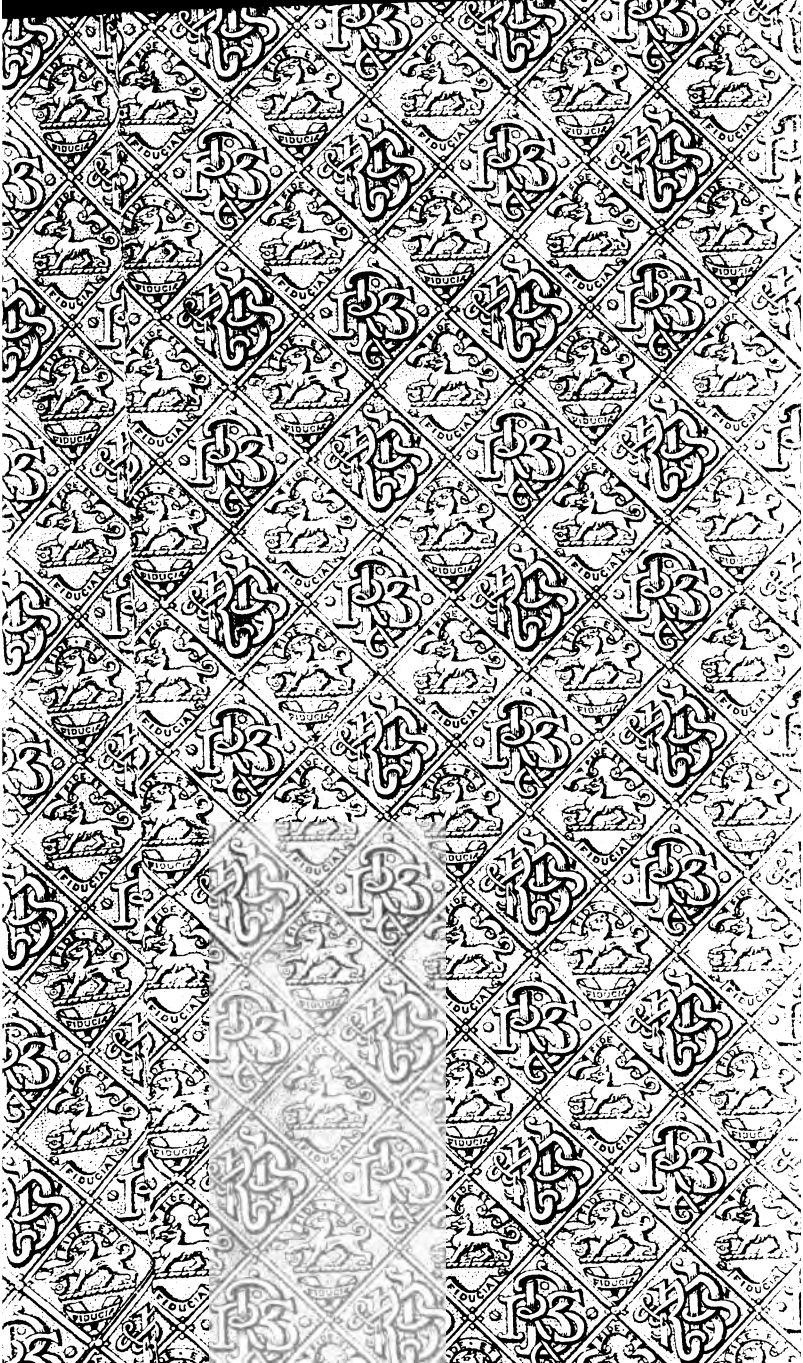

WESTOVER'S WARD.

BY

ALGERNON RIDGEWAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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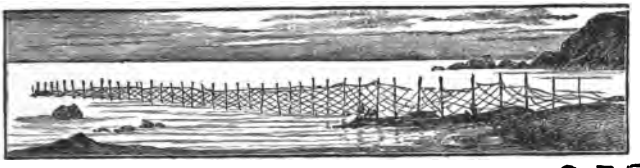

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WESTOVER'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE Denver and Rio Grande Express stops twice a day at a station in South-Western Colerado, called Alamosa. The American has done his best to change into Ala-moos-er this delicious Spanish name. Let not Alamosa, however, deceive you with its liquid music. Of the customs and language belonging to its early Spanish settlers there remains nothing now but—the name. Cities, as well as people, pass through the "ugly age," and

the Alamosa of the American pioneer was, not only repulsively modern and prosaic, but, likewise, rowdy and rough. A treeless western town, made up of rum-shops, "tonsorial" parlours, billiard-halls, gambling-saloons, a wretched hotel, and a railroad depôt—a satire upon a city. Its vulgarity, however, was raised to the very highest power, for it stands in the centre of the San Luis Valley, upon a plateau seven thousand feet above the sea's level, commanding a scene of marvellous beauty, with Sierra Blanca, the Mont Blanc of the Rockies, as sentinel on the northern side, sweeping its white and glorified vision over the lesser peaks of its own range, at the same time that it keeps in view the Sangre de Cristo's chain of glittering taper peaks.

On an October morning of the year

1878, two men jumped from different trains which rushed up almost simultaneously to the rude depôt—one from the north, one from the south; and on the platform these two travellers met, with a surprised handshake, and the words—

"By all the thunders—Meade Westover!"

"Clayborne Harrison—by all that's lucky! Where are you bound for?"

They were Virginians, and once schoolmates; the taller, darker of them was Westover; the freckled-faced, russet-haired, was Harrison.

There was the usual rush on the part of the travellers for the dining-room, and the two Virginians were carried with the stream into a long, narrow, uncarpeted eating-room, which soon showed a solid wedge of conductors, porters, reporters,

miners, and commercial travellers; with, perhaps, a tourist or health-seeker here and there.

At a small table in the shadow sat a lady, the only one of her sex present. From the bit of back and side-face which Harrison glimpsed between the square shoulders of the men, she appeared plump, blonde, well-dressed. Her isolation from her sex did not appear to abash her; on the contrary, she seemed at ease and engrossed with steak and potato. Absolute innocence is sometimes mistaken for shamelessness, thought Harrison, exchanging this indulgent criticism of the lady for a stricture upon his nauseous side dishes. He had seen a valise in the sitting-room, Russia leather, marked with three gilded initials—V. A. C. He was sure that it was hers; and he amused himself wondering what name those

letters stood for, as he languidly dissected a stale trout.

Westover threw down the *Denver Times*, which he had been reading, with a man's unsociability, while awaiting his breakfast, and now plunged his knife into the tough steak, which he ate conscientiously, to the last morsel; for Westover was a man who in all the affairs of life, from the greatest to the least, acted from principle rather than taste.

On his left hand sat a thin unhealthy looking gentleman, with a pimpled face, who ate ravenously and talked incessantly.

"Yonder oldish man," this last volunteered by way of information, pointing out a portly individual seated at the same table with the lady, "is Senator Dowlie. You know him? No? Well, he's a pretty smart chap, I can tell you; he can

buy and sell any man in the state. What he don't know ain't worth knowing."

This was said with a twinkle at the "smart chap," and a crooked sort of smile, as the speaker helped himself to overdone meat and stale bread, with as much apparent relish as if they had been the choicest of fare.

"Where are you going to, eh? Durango, Santa Fee, or the Gap?" he inquired of Harrison, with friendly curiosity.

"I am going to Durango," returned Harrison, briefly.

"You are, are you?" began the new acquaintance cheerily. "Mines, I s'pose?" He waited for a reply, but receiving none, continued, "Durango's a growing place; I tell you it is. The railroad company won't stop till it's a city worth talking about. They are going to put up a new hotel—a regular whopper, so I am told.

But"—as if struck with new and more personal interest—"where are you from?" with a familiar nod at Harrison. "I should say you're from the East—an out-and-out Tender-foot."

"Oh, I am not a Tender-foot; but I suppose almost every one comes from the East originally," Harrison threw in carelessly.

"Well, yes," answered the pimpled gentleman. "Nothing but dogs and children born here. I was twelve years old when I came out; but I was born East, you know. I was born in Kansas city, but I should be inclined to presume that you were from the 'very far East.' You are, ain't you?"

Harrison laughed. His eye lit with a mischievous sparkle as he said, "Yes, I suppose I am from the 'very far East'; as far east as Virginia, at any rate."

"Virginia!" ejaculated the chatty gentleman, whose appetite for facts quite equalled his appetite for trout. "Virginia is a great old state—a good one to come away from, eh?"

"A good one to go back to," corrected Westover, who had been eating his breakfast in silence, and who, having finished, leaned back in his chair gravely, seeing, perhaps, in the dim distance, a silver stretch of river, a grassy bluff, a shaded porch, in front of which hounds frisked with a laughing girl, while a venerable but handsome gentleman stroked his white beard and looked on with a benignant smile.

"Carry me back to old Virginy," hummed Harrison, playing an accompaniment on the dirty breakfast-cloth. "Can't I see old Uncle Jeremiah sitting astride the fence, on moonlight nights, by the run

where the mint grows, singing to a 'corn-stalk fiddle and a shoe-string bow.' I can smell the mint now." He pushed away his plate. "It makes me dream of a julep."

The conversation having become personal, the two Virginians sauntered out of the breakfast-room, and entered the stuffy little parlour.

"That man," explained Westover, indicating their new acquaintance with his thumb, "is a reporter on the *Denver Times*, and he is a man to be afraid of."

"I should not think the sun rose or set in his waistcoat pocket," answered Harrison, carelessly shrugging his shoulders.

"Nevertheless, he is a man to be afraid of, I can tell you. He is a newspaper-gossip of the worst sort, and stops at nothing."

They walked forward, and Harrison,

perceiving a white handkerchief lying upon the floor at his feet, stooped and picked it up. A scent of cologne was wafted from its folds. It belonged, of course, to a woman. He looked round for the owner. In the rude vestibule of the house he saw her, standing alone, two plump hands, clasped together, resting against the soiled weather-stained pillars which supported the wooden hood above the door. He hesitated, glanced down at the initials, V. A. C., on the hem of the handkerchief. Was she miss or madam? The bit of cambric supplied no clue; so, after a second pause, he went straight up to her, hat in hand, bowing gracefully, and said—

"Does this handkerchief belong to you, m—m—iss?"

He stammered out miss, for he had half intended to say madam; but, at his first

word, the lady had turned and fixed full upon him a pair of deliciously blue eyes; so he had dropped unconsciously and involuntarily into miss.

She put out her hand to receive her property, and Harrison, soft fellow, felt as if he had been burnt by those eyes, so like "to that blue flower, which Brahma says blooms nowhere but in paradise." He dared not linger for another glimpse of that heavenly blue, so took himself off, with a second bow, saying to Westover, as they walked away—

"Upon my soul, she's a pretty woman, and nice-looking, too, for these parts!"

"Nice-looking women are not so very rare in these parts," returned Westover, dryly.

Harrison was wont to say that he would never trust the man who spoke slightingly of a woman. He boasted that he was

wax in their hands. He had been engaged ever since thirteen; but, alas! not always to the same woman. His present betrothed was a Miss Grafton, but she was miles and miles away in Virginia, and Harrison often caught himself wishing that the lady of his heart were the lady of somebody else's, and that he were his own man again. His engagement, however, did not bind him very hard; he took it airily, and rhapsodized when he wanted to, and as much as he wanted to, over every new beauty that crossed his path. He did so now, murmuring in Westover's ear—

"I never saw a more enchanting creature—so young too; unmarried, of course."

"Of course! Don't be too sure of that," was Westover's retort, for the sake of opposition, adding, with a grim laugh,

"I'll be willing to bet that she is married; come, I'll bet you two to one, down, that she has a husband—had two or three of them, possibly, judging from her freedom of manner in the dining-room this morning."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

Harrison was eager to vindicate the lady, for in his eyes every handsome woman was above reproach.

"Agreed; but why are you so suspicious, and so harsh, Westover?"

"Simply because I have lived in many wild towns out here in the West; I have looked on at fierce scenes—they have not given me faith in the human race."

"But these are so many glittering generalities"—Harrison snapped his fingers ferociously, as if to abolish generalities—"surely you would not apply them in a par-

ticular instance, and condemn this radiantly lovely creature on general principles?"

"If my words could hurt, I should remain for ever speechless."

"Did you ever see this fair one with the golden locks before?" Harrison inquired after a silence, during which they had seated themselves and lighted their cigars. "Have you seen her before? you know, or think you know, so much about her?"

"This morning, in the dining-room, I saw her for the first time."

"And what did you then see that you did not like?" pursued Harrison, inquisitively, unwilling to let the subject drop. "I thought you were engrossed with your beef-steak."

Westover smiled a faint, dry smile. He was not much of a talker, but there were few things which failed to be noticed by those deep-set sombre eyes of his.

"What I look for in a woman, the very first moment I see her, is not so much beauty as modesty." He puffed at his cigar absent-mindedly.

"Nonsense!" retorted Harrison, snappishly. "You are too hard; you haven't got the old Virginia prejudices out of you yet, for all your progressive talk. Why, modesty is not published on the outside of a woman's back. Why, I thought you said a while ago, or I inferred you said it, that Western women were franker, more unconventional than Eastern women! Anyhow, you are not a wizard, so I will bet you twenty-five dollars, down, that she isn't married; for I don't want her to be married."

"Do belief and inclinations always go together in your case?" asked Westover, lighting a new cigar. "In my own, I have nearly always found them divided;

and I am afraid you wear your heart on your sleeve, Harrison. Is it true?"

"Perhaps," replied the latter; "but I should feel dreadfully cut up, somehow, if I thought that that little angel in blue were already appropriated. Why, she can't be more than seventeen, to save her life." He made a wry face at the word "appropriated."

"I give up on that score," answered Westover. "I am at sea where a woman's age is concerned; but if she should happen to be single, what good would it do you? you could not marry her—you don't even know her."

It was now Westover's turn to look inquisitively at his companion. Harrison made another wry face. With him love was one thing, marriage another; but in Westover's mind they foolishly went together.

"Strange things have happened," laughed Harrison. "But marriage is a disagreeable word; don't use it so often, please." This was an odd thing to be said by the man who was betrothed to Miss Grafton, one of the cleverest women in the world. "I should like to think of a pretty woman's being free, and not tied by those awful fetters of matrimony; I like to think of her as a possible sweetheart, though if she were an actual one she might lose the charm. Don't you ever feel that way, old fellow?"

Westover shook his head. He had no more wish for marriage than his friend, but then, he had never loved but once, years ago, and the woman he had passionately adored jilted him, after which time he had been indifferent to women and their ways.

He was startled by an impetuous move-

ment from Harrison, who cried out, "There she goes now!"

"Who? What?" Westover thought of the train, and turned round abruptly.

"Why, the fair one with golden locks, the blue-eyed nymph, our lady of Alamosa. Who else should it be?" exclaimed Harrison, in the midst of a laugh, but springing up from his chair and craning his neck so as to obtain a good view of the lady, who was wending her way along the sun-beaten stretch of platform in front of them. "She is going to the ticket-office, I do believe," continued he, making a careful survey of the young woman's movements. "Suppose she is going to Durango too; wouldn't it be odd? Come now, Westover, even you must admit that it would be rather jolly. She certainly is a thorough-going beauty."

He laughed, and, the vision in blue having disappeared behind the weather-boarding of the station-house, he leaned against the pilasters of the side portico and looked down upon his friend with an air of do-nothing amiability. He was of medium stature; his light-brown hair was close-cropped, his steel-blue eyes always roving as if in search of some object to interest them. Cheerful, well-bred, in his pepper-and-salt suit, he was a man fitted to please a woman's eye, whether that of mother, sister, wife, or sweetheart. It was agreed between the two that, on Harrison's return from Durango, they should return together to Denver and take an apartment in common. This plan arranged, they strolled into the office, and sat down to write letters. We will read the lover's.

"My dearest Bonnibel (it ran),

"Imagine one of the roughest of western towns—if 'way down in Old Virginy, you can do such a thing—and picture me sitting in the clerk's office, waiting for the train which is to carry me to Durango, where I am going shares pretty strongly in the Alice mine. It is being extended every day, and promises great things. In the West, you know, our motto is, 'Nothing venture, nothing gain.' By-the-by, when are you going to make up your mind that you will be willing to come West to live? I don't think I could ever be induced to live East again, after having once tasted the exhilarating draughts of freedom to be found here among the Rockies. If you don't make up your mind to come quickly, it won't be my fault, remember, but your own, my cruel Bonnibel.

"You could not guess who is sitting beside me at this moment. Meade Westover, of Lady's Meade, a 'something' cousin of yours, I believe. We stumbled upon each other in the most unexpected way this morning. He is the jolliest fellow; well, no, not jolly either, for he is an awfully serious-minded man: a series of contradictions too—a socialist who does not believe in the majority; a religionist who does not believe in the churches; a humanitarian who utters scathing invective; an evolutionist who is not a materialist; a public-spirited man, yet a hater of parties. Such a bundle of oddities is your cousin, Meade Westover. Whether right or wrong, it can be said that he thinks for himself.

"My business is to take me to Denver next, where Westover and I have determined to 'chum' together. I have not

looked upon a woman's face for six months until to-day; I saw a ravishing creature sitting at the Cramer House breakfast-table, dressed in most perfect shade of blue to match her eyes. My prospecting is over for a while, at least; then hurrah for Denver and a taste of civilization. Write often, write every day, write twice a day, if you choose. The train comes whistling in. Adios (to you I consecrate all the Spanish I know).

"Yours in devotion,

"CLAYBORNE HARRISON."

As the writer of this love-letter wetted the seal of his envelope, he directed an eye-twinkle at Westover, who, writing also, sat unconscious of the mental portrait which had been made of him. Harrison's moustachios were twitched by a mischievous smile; for well he knew, the

naughty fellow, that he was ever at a loss for subject-matter for those weekly letters which he felt obliged to dash off to his betrothed; and he felt, at this moment, grateful to his friend for supplying padding to a sweet-hearting epistle. Alas! he is not the first who, galled by love's chains, still makes no effort to loose himself.

When Harrison took his place in the train which was to take him to Durango, he looked around to see who might be his travelling companions. His eyes rested languidly upon Senator Dowlie in earnest converse with the Denver reporter; they quickened when they fell upon a lady sitting a little in front of him—plump, snowy-throated, clad in blue. Whither was she going? What would Westover say? Well, I will not take the didactic view of life. He stroked his chin, yield-

ing to a study of outlines. That plump shoulder suggested to him dimples beneath the close fit of the jacket. The excellent and the inferior are alike in the point of disarming criticism. Perfection is so definite that it arouses sentiments of a purely definite nature; the soul consents without reserve. He found, therefore, dreamy entertainment in this survey, which was not criticism, but a pleasantly engrossed idleness; for Harrison was a man who was apter to tickle ideas than to grasp them. His faculties were fragile antennæ at this stage of his development; muscularity is not bred by feeding on beauty, but on truth, and truth alone. His dreams were struck into a million fragments by a sudden scream from the lady, just as they had left the station a hundred yards behind them. Springing to her feet and looking around her, wildly,

she cried out, transforming her scream into articulated distress—

"Say! I've lef' my v'lise behind at Alamooser. Couldn't you stop the car 'fore it's too late?"

"Stop the fiddlesticks!" interrupted the reporter from the other side of the car, in his playful way, as if he relished the sensation which the lady was exciting.

Taking no notice of his remark, she glided forward towards Harrison, who, in a blind sort of way she seemed to feel, might befriend her; she laid her hand upon his arm, repeating—

"Please, sir, couldn't you make 'em stop the car? We ain't much passed the depôt yet; and all I've got in the world is in that v'lise I lef' at Alamooser." Then, in an imprudently loud whisper, she added, "There's a diamon' bracelet

in it, and it's all I got lef." She stroked his coat-sleeve with a look of appeal which made Harrison feel as weak as water.

"I will do what I can," he said softly; then, motioning to the conductor, who came striding along, his hands in his pockets and an expression of idle unconcern on his face, he cried out, "This lady has left things of value at Alamosa. Couldn't you stop the train and back up to the depôt. It wouldn't take five minutes."

"Things of value! I'd like to know what the loss of a woman's valise amounts to?" growled Senator Dowlie, looking over the sheet of the *Denver Tribune* at them with a sardonic smile. "Men who have business to transact can't be running back'ards and for'ards after women's fixings." Then, with an inclination of

his great stout body, very expressive of contempt, he continued, "If your valise was of such importance, madam, why did you not bring it aboard the train, eh?"

"Did I hear you say there was di'mon's in your valise?" inquired the reporter, curiosity on his face, as he squeezed himself into the little group. "Di'mon's? whew! You don't say so. Goodness me, I should say you was left! I wish I was the man as could be the finder."

He laughed light-heartedly at the frankness of his joke. And the lady, perceiving the futility of her request and the lack of sympathy on the part of her travelling companions, sank back upon her seat, covering her face with her hands in mute despair. Harrison reddened as he caught sight of Dowlie's bold stare and the reporter's insolent leer directed

towards her, and he cried out, somewhat rashly—

"If the conductor does not interfere in this lady's behalf, and if he does not protect her from rudeness, I will; and the man who ventures to make himself offensive to her shall feel the weight of my arm."

The reporter giggled, the conductor smiled, and Senator Dowlie muttered with his grin, which was worse than his frown, "If fighting is what you want, then, sir, I am not your man; though I am willing to bet that my arm is as good for a taste of that sort as yours or any other's; but I'm not quite so anxious as you seem to be to get myself put in the papers."

The reporter tittered gaily, and winked at the conductor.

"See, here, are you this lady's pro-

tector ?" the latter asked, speaking for the first time, and peering into the young man's face.

"If she stands in need of a protector, I am," returned Harrison, with a glance of proud disdain.

"Then you can just tell your lady," he said sneeringly, "that this train is due at ten forty to-night, and cannot be stopped for any valise, not if it contained a whole outfit of diamonds."

He turned on his heel and walked off. The passengers sank into their usual state of apathy after this brief excitement. Senator Dowlie fell asleep, with a newspaper over his face; the reporter linked arms with the conductor, to whom he talked with child-like familiarity. Harrison felt foolish; but he forgot his discomfiture when, on returning to his place, he leaned over the back of the lady's seat and noted

her tremulous mouth, with its down-turned corners.

"Do not distress yourself," he began kindly. "The conductor refuses to stop and back up to the depôt; but I will telegraph to the station-master, also to the proprietor of the Cramer House. I have a friend, too, in Alamosa, who will do his best to recover your valise."

The girl—for she was very young—smiled; a constellation of dimples twinkled in her cheek—each dimple seemed to be the home of a flashing cupid, an airy little love-god that sent forth a shower of darts; tears still clung to her lashes, but they only gave to her an April-faced freshness.

Harrison, looking down into her eyes, felt as if he were gazing into two azure-tinted morning glories filled with dew.

"Will you give me a description of your

valise, also a list of its contents ?" he asked, taking out pencil and paper to note the items.

It took some time to complete this list to Harrison's satisfaction ; his companion was not very lucid about anything but the "di'monds."

At La Jara the train stopped ; Harrison jumped off to look for the telegraph-office. "I will send the message in my own name," he said to himself ; Westover will understand better, and will attend to it more quickly. The truth was, he had not yet learned the name of his fair travelling companion, and he had felt a certain delicacy in asking it. This business attended to, he looked around him. In the centre of the plaza was the earthen oven, in which bread was baked for the town ; on the house-tops, numerous goats were browsing the few spears of grass

that sprang up from the gravelly soil, glad to have a chance at existence; a long line of waggons, laden with supplies for the remote mining-towns, stood ready for starting. The scene would have pleased the artist, the student of life, the ranchman; but Harrison was none of these. He found no interest in volcanic rock, or in the Rocky Mountain flora; he was simply an easy-tempered fellow, careless, happy, who desired to see every one else in the world as careless and as happy as he. At the depôt of La Jara he purchased some fruit, the only thing not stale which he could find—California fruit, perfect in appearance as the pictures of fruit in a horticulturist's manual. As he was wondering whether the strange lady whose cause he was so rashly espousing, preferred peaches to pears or pears to peaches, he heard the reporter, who had been walking up and

down the platform, murmur close to his ear, "Well, I declare, if that fellow ain't struck all-into-a-heap! Whew!" Without so much as a glance at him, Harrison crossed the platform, stepped into the train, and walked straight toward his new acquaintance, who sat still where he had left her.

"I have taken the liberty of getting something for you," he began, with hesitation, embarrassed by the unknown's beauty. "Won't you have one of these peaches, or a pear?"

He need not to have hesitated in making this offer, for she accepted both—the peach and the pear—with the frankest alacrity; and in an instant her teeth were wedged into the rounded cheek of a ripe pear. Harrison could not repress a smile of amusement when she exclaimed, after making way with it, heaving at the same

time a long-drawn sigh of relief, "My stars! wasn't I hongry though!" Was there ever such an artless creature? Galatea, when first endowed with life, could not have been more unsophisticated. Eve, in the blossom of womanhood—that first womanhood which the world ever saw, and which must have been only a superior sort of childhood—could not have been more exasperatingly simple, more bewitchingly illiterate. She was as much at ease with him as if she had known him all her life, while he felt timidity in the presence of a beauty which well-nigh took away the breath.

"If she only did not have such a deuced accent!" thought Harrison; but, quite the same, he leaned over the back of her seat to catch each word she uttered, deuced accent and all, by turns being fascinated and shocked—shocked by her

rude accent and the burr of her *r*'s, as if a rosebud were to open and shake out of its velvet folds a noisy, ugly bee. "Her mouth is a rose," he said to himself, "and it has its thorn."

The passengers slumbered, the train flew, its racket preventing conversation. Jarred by the motion, the coils of her hair loosened, and one by one several ringlets, bright and playful as sunbeams, strayed about her shoulders. Harrison sat bolt upright, his arms folded, watching the girl who lolled in front of him on the red plush cushions, and he did not budge until twilight snatched the whites and vermilions, so cunningly blended in her face, from his gaze; then he strolled into the smoking-car, where he chanced upon a business friend, a Mr. Becker, manager of the Alice mine, with whom he found so much to talk about, that

the lights of Durango were flashing out of the darkness before he remembered his self-imposed charge; his interest was piqued not a little by her youth, her beauty, her helplessness, her loneliness, and a sense of mystery which surrounded her. It was awkward that Becker should keep so close to him; he had to make some trifling excuse for delay. Freed from Becker, Harrison rushed into the car which he had occupied during the afternoon. He found his overcoat, his portmanteau, and his umbrella, but no lady; she was gone, and not a trace of her left behind. The passengers had scattered and the depôt was nearly deserted when he stepped out upon the platform. Even the hotel omnibus with its solitary passenger was departing, and though Harrison might have shouted for the vehicle to stop and wait for him, had he been so

minded, he concluded to walk instead, the keen night air of the mountain-town being acceptable to him after the close atmosphere of the smoking-car.

CHAPTER II.

HARRISON was possessed with the desire that no one, not even Becker, should be aware of the interest he felt in his travelling companion; not that he intended to be importunately attentive or indiscreetly civil—but simply that he felt his own weakness where beauty was concerned. He knew that it swayed him, and he feared lest he might be drawn into some act of rashness which would make him the subject of laughter among his friends. He strolled along towards the hotel, therefore, with a sense of relief that fate had thus interposed between himself and the

heroine of his day's adventure. His glance lingered upon the hotel register, after he had signed his name, when lo! behold, on the space above, he caught sight of the words V. A. Cloud, with the prefix "miss."

V. A. Cloud was identical, of course, with V. A. C. in the gilt lettering on the valise. Fate was playing him a trick then. She was in the same hotel after all. Cloud was her name. What did the other initials stand for? And miss! She was unmarried. He was right; Westover wrong. The twenty-five dollars were won. Cloud; nice name, he reflected, his eyes glued to the autograph in an unskilled woman's hand. It is a name that suggests softness and freshness, and it suits her to a T. Now I shall have an opportunity. The telegram was to be sent here. Perhaps it has come. I will inquire. So

delicate of her to come to the hotel alone; though I wish she had waited a minute longer. She might have understood I was coming back. But fate played him another trick. He caught no glimpse of My Lady Gold Locks that night. Mysteriously had she come, mysteriously gone.

Two hours next morning completed his business; and he was sauntering back lazily to the hotel, when he was startled by the subject of yesterday's dreams—the Miss Angela Cloud of the strangers' book—who came forward to meet him, a good morning in the auroral tints of her face.

"Good morning, Miss Cloud," he said, with odd emphasis on the word "miss," and lifted his hat.

She gave him a startled look, then recovered herself.

"I saw you comin', Mr.—Mr.—well, never mind——"

"Harrison," suggested the owner of that name, thinking that he did mind.

"Mr. Hairison, did you say" (flattening the *a*'s carefully)? "It's like seeing of a friend to meet up with you again; you've got the hear-rt in your face. Can you tell a poor girl what to do? I could have swore, yesterday, as I had friends here, who would have holped me; but they've cleared out, I'm told—gone to the Gunnison—and I'm left all in a snarl, discomboberated."

Harrison, with his hat still in his hand, stood for a moment transfixed, incapable of speech. Accustomed in a cultured society to what often seemed to him refined inanities, he was at once attracted and repelled. How terrific, he thought, one instant; how charmingly natural the next. Which phrase, in the minds of those who use it carelessly, means neither more nor

less than, How becomingly she obeys instinct! We often glorify this relegation of man or woman to the domain of the animal; for we are easily deceived, mistaking coarseness for strength in others, impressionableness for genius in ourselves. In the presence of melting cheek and shoulder lines, Harrison's judgment halted between the horns of a dilemma. You might get a side, or a back, or a front view of her, it was all the same; there was no slighted corner. Speech gave the lie to her lips, and changed her from a peerless beauty to a perilous paradox. Her physical development was in inverse ratio to her mental. Indeed, you might have said that her body had plundered her mind's vitality, and set it at defiance. They walked together to the hotel piazza.

"What must I do?" she asked, with

a directness which made Harrison's moustache tremble in the direction of a smile.

"Go back to your friends, those that you have just left."

She shook her head. "They wern't friends, these I lef'."

Harrison was puzzled. "But you ought to go back to look after your valise; we have had no news of it, you know."

"I can't go back."

She thought slowly; one would have said her faculties were clogged with the *detritus* caused by the sluggish mental activities of her ancestors.

"Where will you go then?"

"Nowheres."

"Will you stay here?"

"I can't stay here." Harrison was mystified, but her insistance compelled

answer. "Look here, I haven't got a rade cent to—my name; an' that's—why." She sat down in a rocking-chair on the hotel porch, and looked as miserable as such a cherub-faced creature could. "I had some in my bag, and my di'mon' bracelet; but that's gone. I expected friends here, but they're gone. I am onfortunate—very onfortunate."

These words, repeated on the downward slide, gave the melody of a refrain to what she said. Harrison's interest survived the shock of her language and warmed to her perplexities. The blood derived from an ancient stock whose chief was a Knight of the Golden Horse-Shoe made him glow just now with the heat of kindliness rather than amourousness, though it is to be feared that with him the two emotions were interchangeable. A woman in need! this was enough. He sat down beside

her and turned the question over in his mind. There was some mystery attached to this girl, but delicacy deterred him from striving to unravel it; and she herself was wonderfully non-committal for so simple-minded a creature. She knew that she had something to conceal, and she clung to concealment with the tenacity of a dull mind.

"Miss Cloud," said Harrison, at last, "you must return the way you came. You must go back to your friends—your friends at the other end, you know. Your best way," he pursued, without noting her evasive reply, "will be to secure your valise, which is at Alamosa, and then——"

Another head-shake. She was stubbornly negative. People decry the animal in man: it is well. But why do they not decry the vegetable much more?

If beef breeds the passions, beans and potatoes breed unintelligent persistence; not better, but worse. What so stupidly tenacious as the vegetable which forces its way through sheer rock? The animal passions are tremendous motive powers, and, if controlled, contain the germ of the heroic virtues.

"Oh, my di'mon's! my di'mon's!" threw in the girl in passionate *crescendo.*

Harrison used the diamonds as an argument, and again urged her return to Alamosa.

"But—how can I go to—Ala-moosser? I haven't got a copper, not ef it wuz to kill me. I can't pay my hotel bill—there now!"

Harrison threw back his head and laughed. Such jargon upon the lips of an ugly woman might have been almost picturesque, but falling from Angela

Cloud's, it was a painful rather than a pleasing antithesis.

"Well, staying here won't help you, anyway," he said, after a moment of seriousness; then, "Come, Miss Cloud, let me attend to the matter of the bill for you, if that's all to keep you here."

She looked at him attentively; then, flashing into dimples, said—

"Upon my soul and body, you air a number one fellow!"

She took her soul's name in vain without the smallest compunction.

Harrison pulled out his watch.

"It is train time now." He looked a trifle embarrassed. "If I had your little account, now, you know, I could pay it at once. Suppose we go to the parlour and ring for it."

They rose to go. The proceeding struck Harrison as queer, but he was

the only one of these two who seemed to find it so.

Miss Cloud evidently had no more idea of the conventionalities than if she had been a wild flower growing in the deepest, narrowest gorge of the Rockies. Finding a protector, she accepted his protection freely as it was offered.

"Well, I guess I'll go back to Alamoos-ser. I'll stop over a train there, so's to git my v'lise, and then I'll go on to Denver."

On the return trip Harrison strove to interest himself in the scenery outside the car-window. A desert unrolled before his eye, darkened with growths of sage-bush. Sprinklings of grey adobe houses on a back-ground of brown soil marked the Mexican pueblo. Groups of children played in front of the American ranch under squat piñon trees; while prairie dogs, sitting

upon their haunches, nibbled, peeped at the flying train, then scampered down into their holes with cautious haste. Sometimes the scene was dreary in the extreme, with huge buttes, grotesque in shape, like buffalo heads turned to stone, frowning down upon the landscape, and making mute protest against the invasion of travellers into the great wide waste which they were guarding. Sometimes the earth took on a milder expression, and an occasional fir, hemlock, or a cluster of willow-leafed cotton woods, gave a gentle touch of green to the sun-burned plateau. But Harrison was no lover of scenery, and soon wearied of it; he touched upon the paraphernalia of life, not its essential points, being chiefly occupied with style, habit, manners, and physiognomy. Habit is the animal's garment; style, the intellect's; manner, that

of the moral nature; virtue, and virtue only, is the soul's dress. Even physiognomy cannot be trusted; it is human. We may approach the purely spiritual with entire trust, but not the human; it deceives others, it deceives itself. Harrison soon turned from the landscape to the lady. He discovered that she had lived in mining towns, that she was wonderfully knowing about wines, opera-singers, trinkets, colognes, and that she was wonderfully ignorant about the customs of good society. But oh, the splendour of her blush! At a mere nothing it rushed to her cheeks; at a turn of the head, a bend of the throat, an adjustment of her draperies, as if in testimony of the healthful young blood which coursed through her veins.

What a countenance for love-lights! These women with outward play of feature

strike men (who look usually at the outside) as the women with the capacity for loving. Alas! there are prophets and false prophets, and the women who most charmingly simulate love are not always those who respond to the inward sentiment. Harrison, however, with the human weakness, absorbed himself in colour—the colour of a woman's cheek, a woman's eye, a woman's hair, a woman's soulless smile and empty laugh, supplying, in his imagination, the thought and the feeling which we naturally ascribe to transcendent beauty; for beauty intoxicates as well as wine; it maddens the world, misleading the judgment of the gravest men, and Harrison was not a grave man. "She is a runaway school-girl, or a runaway daughter from harsh parents," he surmised, piqued by the contradictory suppositions which presented themselves to his mind. It was only

when they drew near to Alamosa that he began to realize the inconvenient side of this adventure.

Already Alamosa loomed up before them. Suppose she would not be shaken off; he had heard of such things. Harrison, going against established customs, prescribing his own laws, called himself a radical, but the word was merely a dignified sobriquet for selfism. Most of us are twiddlers with words, and, so far as we are so, we are humbugs. The train rushed up to the station. Harrison helped his companion down the steps of the car to the platform, when, of a sudden, he received such a blow upon the back between the shoulder-blades as to be knocked against the jutting wood-works of the car.

The force of the shock, however, gave him a rebound. In an instant's time he

recovered his consciousness enough to perceive a group of men standing around him in the red glare of the train-master's lantern, the foremost man hurling at him a volley of English, seasoned with very vicious Spanish. This was apparently the one who had dealt Harrison the blow. In a stunned sort of way our young Virginian strove to make out the identity of this blatant fellow, whose belt contained pistols, and whose wide sombrero shadowed a pair of leaping, dare-devil eyes, which emitted now and again a red sparkle in the unsteady flare of the lantern. In vain. The assailant was a stranger, and Harrison was wholly unable to piece together events in such a way as to understand the cause of the unprovoked assault. He was not allowed much time for reflection, however, for the assailant, swinging his lantern backwards and forwards over Harrison's

head, demanded in a threatening tone, but in good English—

"Curse my boots, you villain, but what do you mean by running away with my wife, eh?"

"Your wife!" ejaculated Harrison, as, regaining intelligence at these words, he sprang from the ground with a sudden leap, "your wife! what do you mean? I am a peaceable man—and a gentleman, I would have you to know, which is more than can be said of you." He attempted to lift his arm, but a paroxysm of pain warned him that it must be either sprained or broken, he did not yet know which. "The devil take you," he continued, more angrily, finding that his arm was useless, "I know neither you nor your wife—never set eyes on either of you, to my knowledge."

"You never did, did you?" jeered

the Mexican, with a taunt. "There's American honesty for you," he appealed to the group, through which a murmur ran like the soughing of wind. After which, turning to Harrison, who still stood aghast, though beginning to take in the details of the scene, he cried, "Then who is this woman you left Alamosa with on the down train yesterday, and came back with on the up train to-day? I want to hear you say again just once more that you never set eyes on this woman;" and the Mexican frontiersman—for such he was—rudely pushed forward a woman, whose figure he had screened before by means of his own person, but whom he now shook from him at arms' length, at the same time that he grasped her hand as with a vise.

Harrison found himself bending forward inquisitively to scrutinize the woman's face

in the lantern's unsteady glare. Was it Angela, the pretty Angela Cloud, into whose innocent countenance he had smiled so often that day? Was she the bully's wife? Silence reigned. Harrison forgot the twinges of pain in his arm, he was so inexpressibly shocked at what he beheld. He could only gaze in mute horror at Angela Cloud; while she, striving to wrest her hand from the harsh grasp in which it was caught, turned towards him imploringly. There was a beauty in her blanched despair which even now insinuated itself into Harrison's soft heart. But what could he do? He was helpless. He was innocent, too, of the imputation, helplessly, absurdly innocent, though appearances were against him. He leaned towards one of the props of the station-way and surveyed the girl, whose face was irradiated by

the lurid lantern light, in mute consternation.

"Aha! you know her, I see; I thought you did," cried the husband, dragging this woman he called his wife closer to him, in order that he might fling her away with the greater violence, while such expletives as "Sangre de Christo!" "Diavolo!" intermingled with the lowest oaths to be found in our language, burst forth from the roughs who composed the group. Angela, thrown to the ground by the sudden loosing of her husband's hand, now picked herself up and fled in haste. When several of the gaping spectators, who were enjoying the scene, made a motion of pursuit, he called out roughly, "Let her go, let her go; she likes change, and so do I." A laugh ran through the crowd, and after it had ceased, the Mexican turned towards Harrison with

the words, pronounced in a tone of utmost insolence, "And now, sir, let us hear what you have to say for yourself."

"Nothing," answered Harrison, drawing himself up haughtily—"nothing to you."

At this juncture a couple of horsemen galloped up, dismounted, and plunged into the crowd. Immediately a familiar voice rang out—

"Is that you, Harrison, old fellow? I would have saved you from this trouble if I could; but, after receiving your telegram, I discovered, accidentally enough, that Mr. Prentiss here"—indicating the assailant—"was in search of his wife, who, it seems, had run away from him. She was traced to this point by her valise, and a telegram sent to one of the stations on the road procured the further information that a lady was on the train answering the description given of her, in

company with a gentleman who I very much feared was you, from the blue eyes, light brown moustache, and pepper-and-salt suit. My fears have proved correct, but it is an easy matter to explain to Mr. Prentiss and his friends,"—glancing sarcastically at the rough and ready throng—"that the affair is the purest accident, and that you are free from the smallest implication in the matter."

Harrison glanced at his friend with an eye of gratitude, but maintained silence and his haughty pose.

Westover spoke a few words in a cool, common-sense way—a mingling of sarcasm and friendliness, such as master the masses; and it mastered now this assemblage of miners, railroad employées, and loafers who clustered around him with stretched mouths, listening for dear life. Prentiss only, who was something of

a free-lance, seemed inclined for further tumult. He did not relish settling an affair so simply. He clung to his grievance, though he cast off his wife. He swaggered a good deal, muttered, touched the bowie-knife tucked inside his belt, uttered some oaths in high-sounding Spanish, and was the perfection of melodrama. On the stage he would have won laurels, but, under Westover's suasion, the bystanders appeared to discover that they were growing weary of the handsome villain and his cause; one by one, they dropped off to get a drink, to try a game of pool or of faro, or to settle some choice little private dispute.

In less than a half-hour the platform of the Alamosa depôt was in moonlit solitude. Harrison and Westover alone remained; they had concluded to wait here for the arrival of their train.

To be the hero of a street-brawl—this was a humiliation for F. F. V.-dom; and the heroine a woman who murdered the king's English like a factory girl. By the way, where was she gone? To the ends of the earth, Harrison hoped; so far that he might never set eyes on her again.

Westover sat in the splendid moonlight, silent, absorbed in the glittering crest of the San Juan mountain, which he faced. Harrison nursed his wounded arm and his still more wounded feelings, also in silence; while a pair of eyes peeped at the two men from behind the wooden abutment of an old engine-house a hundred paces down the track. There were two hours of waiting, and there were two hours of watching on the part of this pair of eyes. Were they blue eyes or black? Impossible to distinguish, for all that the

moon shone so brightly, giving a supernatural definiteness to objects too insignificant for notice in the commonplace brightness of mid-day.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Harrison entered the sleeping-car he quivered with silent rage. Westover could have realized a laugh at his friend's expense, but understood that the time was not yet come for open indulgence in mirth. On the rear platform he enjoyed this deferred laugh quietly, all to himself. Then he purchased two bottles of Budweiser, and began to offer that rude sort of consolation which men so thoroughly appreciate from each other.

"Come, old fellow," he said soothingly, and drew the cork; "here is a nightcap, eh?"

Harrison, staring gloomily out of the car-window, held out his hand, took the tumbler of Budweiser, and drained at a draught the darkly bubbling liquid; then he turned around to set down the glass, and, catching a comical expression on his friend's face, as well as a furtive sparkle in those usually controlled eyes, he himself gave way, and burst into a fit of laughter, in which Westover, heartily boisterous, joined. Harrison's ill-humour vanished.

"That ruffian has left his confounded mark on me," he cried, a spasm of pain contracting his muscles, as he tried to adjust his arm to a more comfortable position.

There was much to talk over. The moon rode high, touching brilliantly the desolate heights of Mule Shoe, and the train seemed to leap down the steep

grade of the Veta Pass, before the young men could make up their minds to sleep. Harrison's slumbers were uneasy; and on waking in the morning, he heard Westover's voice in conversation with some one else close by. Peeping through the curtain shading his berth, he had a vision of a young woman with tears in her eyes, whom his friend was striving, very gravely, to console. Harrison sank back on his pillow, and groaned aloud with the spasm of pain the sudden movement produced in his sprained arm. The voices ceased, steps approached—Westover's. He drew aside the curtain, and, seating himself on the edge of Harrison's berth, plunged into his announcement without preamble.

"Mrs. Prentiss is aboard the train; she left Alamosa last night when we did."

He waited to see the effect of the communication, but Harrison replied, with coolness.

"Yes, yes, I know. I heard you talking with her just now."

He said no more, so Westover continued—

"It is unfortunate, very. Could I have foreseen such a possibility as this, I would have advised our waiting two whole days in that hole, Alamosa, rather than have risked this meeting."

"I suppose that we need not trouble ourselves any more about her than we would do about any other fellow-passenger, need we?" Harrison fixed his steel-blue eyes on Westover's thoughtful face.

"There's the difficulty," was the answer. "She makes an unblushing appeal to you. She says that on your account her husband drove her last night from Alamosa,

threatening to take her life if ever he should set eyes on her again; she declares that she is without the means even of getting to Denver, where she has an acquaintance — Lillehammer — who has offered her a place in his company." Westover watched the effect of his words upon Harrison before adding, "For oddity, she beats every woman I ever saw—hollow," —he laughed—"such language as comes from those lips of hers! She may be harmless, and I must confess to feeling sorry for her; but she has already led you into trouble, Harrison, and I'm inclined to think she may be an adventuress—a bad lot, in spite of her innocent ways. You'll have to keep her at a distance; and yet——"

Truth was, there lay under Westover's matter-of-fact exterior more fantastic notions of chivalry, more quixotic ideas of

responsibility, than troubled Harrison, who often said, "When a fine mind becomes crazed, fanaticism is the result — or asceticism, or mysticism, or some such wild scheme of living. Westover has his practical side, but he has, running along with it, the queerest theories; his name is Don Quixote."

"What would you advise me to do?" the latter asked.

"Why, leave her alone, and let her go to——"

"To the devil?" asked Harrison, sententiously. "For his satanic majesty is, unfortunately, the goal of too many young women with handsome faces like Angela Cloud's."

This speech in all its baldness touched Westover to the quick. A spasm of feeling contracted the lines of thought in his countenance. Harrison was ready to be

the champion of beauty in distress; but Westover, with a wider spirit of humanity, was ready to be its martyr, if need were, to protect not beauty but innocence. He considered it his duty, however, in his quality of practical man and friend, to warn his more impulsive companion; so he remarked in a cautioning tone—

"If you give him a chance, that ruffian Prentiss will pitch into you again. He evidently likes scenic effect—fancies himself a hero, wishes to pick a quarrel with you, and he may not let you off so easily a second time; a pistol aimed by his hand might surprise you at any street-corner. We hear of such things now and then, and Prentiss, I strongly suspect, is as much madman as outlaw."

Harrison made a wry face; then, with a sudden access of sympathy, he added—

"Good heavens, Westover, if you are right, and your estimate of Prentiss correct, one can hardly blame the little girl for running away from the villain. What is she going to do when she gets to Denver? Did she tell you?"

Westover gave an embarrassed laugh.

"She knows what she is going to do about as much as a child would know. She calls you that 'awful nice feller;' counts upon your getting her to Denver, where she has wild hopes of joining a theatrical company under the management of Lillehammer, who, she says, once offered her a position as first soprano in his troupe."

"Theatrical company!" ejaculated Harrison, aghast. He had the Southerner's prejudice against publicity for women.

"Why not?" threw in Westover. "The stage is a legitimate business; I should

advocate anything that is honest, and if she maintain herself honestly in it."

"But the temptations for such a peerless creature, such a delicious fool!" exclaimed Harrison, with an impetuous movement of the arm which drew from him another groan. Just now he had nothing to do, the excitable fellow, but to revel in sympathy; and the feeling was to him as delightful as evanescent. "She is right. I ought to help her after what has happened. I was rather imprudent in the first instance, and now, I suppose, I must pay for it."

Westover shook his head gravely. "You are wrong, Harrison, to commit a second act of imprudence because you have already committed one. As sure as you entangle yourself with this, to say the worst, runaway wife, you will get yourself into trouble. If you think that she has a claim upon

your generosity, let me give her a ticket to Denver, as I have had no connection with her heretofore; then we need take no further notice of her; the smoking-car is open to us for the rest of the way."

It was now Harrison who shook his head, crying impatiently, "Come, your plan is churlish; I am going to get up this minute. I'm devoured with curiosity to hear what Madame Golden-Hair has to say for herself. She owes me an apology for styling herself 'miss,' and for letting me think her unmarried; probably she thought the better by this to avoid detection, perhaps. 'Shaw! women love mystery. Ugh! that brute of a husband!" He winced with the pain of moving his arm to right his disordered dress. Seeing an expression of concern upon his friend's countenance, he added reassuringly, "Oh, I'll be all prudence, you know. Ugh!

She made me lose my bet, too, the witch!" He dived into a side-pocket, drew out a wallet, and took from it three notes. "There are my twenty-five dollars, Westover, paid down. A bet's a bet, you know; so take them while you can get them"—he laughed—"for my notes are all legs—South American centipedes, eh?"

Westover laughed too. "I'll go halves with you, Harrison; this shall be the money which shall carry Mrs. Prentiss to Denver. What say you?"

Harrison shook his head. "Why, you are not fair at a bet, old fellow. We shan't go halves at all. This is my scrape, and a deuced one"—a groan—"There, give me my hat. I won't deny it; I feel curious to know what Madame Gold-Hair will say for herself. She is Surprise-on-two-feet."

When Harrison walked up to Mrs. Prentiss a few moments later, his arm fastened in a sling, she made a plunge at him, crying aloud, in high-pitched staccato—

"I'm *that* glad to see you! Bobby Prentiss is a roofian to hurt you like that." She touched the sling. "Is it broke? No? Well, some fine day he'll be breaking his own neck, riding that striped pony of his. I wish he would. He's a blamed roofian." She whispered softly in his ear, "Don't you wish he would break his neck?"

Perhaps Harrison did; but few people like to have their murderous intentions put into language and voiced—into such language, too, and voiced—how? In silver resonant tones, that would have set off some little quatrain or roundel. He was shocked into an instant's silence.

She was so young and strong that fatigue showed no other effect in her than a slight diminution of colour. The glow of health was usually too ruddy. In a picture it would have been called daring; but now it was softened down into a vivid paleness that entreated, rather than compelled, the eye. Harrison's heart, always in a melting state, became more liquid. He forgot her rough phrasing, in a mouth which would have made a charming frame for the "fitliest-spoken words" that ever fell from human lips.

"How can I serve you, Mrs. Prentiss?" He bowed with gay friendliness.

"Mrs. Prentiss!" echoed the young woman. "Mrs. Prentiss, by jee-miny! Don't call me that, or—or I won't like you one bit; I'll turn clean round, and like t'other one better."

This last was in a whisper; but "t'other

one" heard, and blushed as if he had been sixteen.

"You frighten me within an inch of my life," cried Harrison, laughing. "What shall I call you, if not Mrs. Prentiss?"

"Call me Aingy. *He* never called me by that name, and I like it. It was my name at school."

She had tied her face up in a knot; but now smiles untied the lines, and she stretched her hands out upon her lap—straight, so that each knuckle unfolded a dimple deep as acorn-cups. There was no shyness about her. She looked at you with a direct glance, showing that she placed implicit trust in herself and in everybody else. Strange mixture of helplessness and of independence, of familiarity and of simplicity.

"Child or woman?" thought Harrison. Thought Westover, "Innocent or design-

ing?" and he counted in succession the eight dimples that set off her hands more enchantingly than rings could have done.

"How beautiful your name is in Spanish, Angel—Anhel!" He repeated the name in English, then in Spanish, with varying shades of meaning. "An-hel mia," he said, finally, piqued to know how she would regard this soft implication. He might have made a bolder venture, but refrained. Was it the girl's delicacy that restrained him, or his own, or Westover's, who sat close by, his eyes glued to the newspaper, which, by-the-by, he held upside down?

"Don't give me any of your Mexican names," she cried. "No, sir, none of that lingo for me; they are low trash, the scum. Bob Prentiss was half-breed; they're a mix of Injun, nigger, American,

Spanish. But I'm pure American, I'd have you to know."

She shared her class's prejudice against the Mexican. Then why had she married one? Woman's inconsistency, thought Harrison. They could not shake her off; she clung close. There was a feminine quality about her which appealed to them; and yet her femininity contained no element of true womanliness; but the animal oftentimes presents more pathos to man than his more complex fellow-man.

At Pueblo they breakfasted, and Angela required but little suasion to be induced to eat an abundant meal. Food brought back the brightness of bloom which fatigue had driven from her cheek, and after the change of trains she looked radiant.

"We must talk with her about her

plans," proposed Westover, as they finished their cigars on the platform. "Our money has brought her thus far. Should she come to harm, we should feel as if we were, in some way, instrumental."

"Have you fully concluded how great a venture you are making, Mrs. Prentiss, in going so far from your friends—young, alone, and without means? What will you do in a city like Denver?"

He sat down by her side, while Harrison placed himself on the seat fronting them. As she did not answer, Westover continued to question.

"Is your father living?"

"Yes."

"Then why not go to him?"

"Yes, go to your father instead of remaining in Denver. We will gladly help you to get to him, wherever he may be," Harrison threw in eagerly.

"No—NO—NO!" cried she, with a progressive emphasis on each No.

"But consider, if your husband is not your protector, your father is," persisted Westover.

"Nen-ni" (a coined negative); "poppa give me over when I run off with Bobby Prentiss."

The men exchanged glances. Here was a serious business, a young woman, given over, as she herself confessed, by her two lawful protectors.

"Your father, Mrs. Prentiss, where is he?" persisted the questioner.

"Poppa? Oh, he's in the Ute Canon, but Metallic Accident is his post-office. It's quite a town, over there in Utah, you know, 'mong the Mormons. Poppa is a Mormon himself now, but I don't like the Mormons." She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"I should think not," murmured Harrison, in blank amazement.

"Tell us about yourself, Mrs. Prentiss," began Westover. "We can help you better if we understand what we are about."

Little by little he drew the girl's history from her; and the following is the substance of what she told. Her father, the son of a cotton-planter in Arkansas, had been a handsome, idle spendthrift. Going once to New Orleans, he fell in love with Mimi Svansen, a pretty Swede, a simple creature. She had come to America as a nurse, but her fair face and fresh, thrilling voice were the means of her joining a band of travelling minstrels. Some tender words won her heart; young Cloud—that was the wooer's name—married her; and, as he had nothing but debts for his portion, and nothing to expect from his parsimonious

father but reproaches, he went West, and took up his abode in Southern Colorado. A rude pioneering life he led there, enlivened by squabbles with his neighbours, who were at that time fractious Mexicans or illiterate half-breeds. Fond of change, he crossed the Rockies, and settled, later on, among the thriftier Mormons, adopting their customs and even their religion. Here he made, in time, a considerable fortune; but, happily for her, the pretty Swede wore out before all this came to pass. She died, leaving behind her a daughter, beautiful as an Undine, with a skin as white as milk and hair as soft as silk-floss.

By the time he had reached middle life, Virginius Cloud had become as parsimonious as before he had been prodigal; but he sent his daughter—an apple of discord in his family—to a boarding-school,

near an old Spanish settlement, which boasted "Eastern advantages." The daughter never again saw her father's house. The school which boasted of "Eastern advantages," and which gave to Angela Cloud the meagre scattering knowledge which she possessed, was held in a low adobe building, forming a part of the Spanish convent of Lorette. Hither came to be educated, sallow-cheeked, grave-eyed Mexican girls, and some few Americans, the daughters of mining prospectors; but what a difference between the youth of these two nationalities! The Mexicans were timid, sluggish, and precise, while the American girls were wide awake, inquisitive, and insubordinate; both alike were ignorant. The instruction given was of the simplest and most primitive kind — samplers, waxwork music (better taught than anything else),

and the most rudimentary English branches.

"English is the only language we teach," Sister Immediana was wont to say with pride. "We must make these Mexican girls practical, for when they grow up they will marry American citizens. They must learn the language of their country."

How Sister Immediana and how these embryonic American citizens would have opened their eyes, could they have known the curriculum of one of those Eastern schools which it was their ambition to emulate!

The convent of Lorette had been in early days an Indian mission, and this may account for the fact that two of its sides faced directly upon the road, with which it communicated by means of a flight of steps descending from a portál.

The good nuns had done their best to make this portál as retired as possible by setting out for its protection a piñon hedge. On the other two sides of the house spread a garden, encircled by a parapeted wall. Here the pupils were wont to take their pleasure, and the Mexican damsels were content with its pleached walks, its rows of hollyhocks, its pond choked with the leaves of an overshadowing willow; the simple pleasures of throwing crumbs to minnows, or counting the apples as they ripened, or watching the shadows flit across the sun-dial that stood beside the hundred-leaved rose-bush, were enough for them. But this stagnation was repulsive to the American girls.

Angela, though fair as a water-lily among these swarthy Pancrasias and Pompositas, was prosaic as any of them. She

liked to stare out of windows; she longed for fine clothes; and she sighed for the commonplace mining town which had given her birth.

One day in the early summer which preceded the beginning of this story, the Sisters were busy preparing for a festa. Holiday was given, and the young people hastened away to spend it according to their various fancies.

Angela shook down her hair, of the purest gold, long, and so abundant that it wrapped her as with a mantle. She plaited and unplaited it, spread it over the window-sill, delighting in the sparkle which the sun gave to its glorious masses. But to play alone, even with the most beautiful hair in the world, must at last grow tiresome; so she said, after an hour of this amusement, "I guess I'll give it a ducking;" and she did. Then

she climbed out upon the roof of the portál, laid her head down on the earthen cornice, and tossed the loose masses of dripping hair over the edge to dry it in the sun.

What would Sister Immediana have said? She was far off, in the chapel, dressing the Virgin for the festa. All the good sisters were there. Where was Bidal? where was Pomposita? where was Antonita? where were the American Susies, Matties, and Ginnies? Bidal was finishing her sampler; Pomposita was humming "La Mantilla," in the hammock, too lazy to swing; Antonita was gathering flowers to place before the image of her patron saint. The three American girls were off by themselves, at the further edge of the garden, their chairs tilted against three pear-trees, and talking about clothes, how many rings they had, how many young men they

knew, how much their fathers were worth. So Angela had the sloping adobe roof of the portál all to herself. Through the tall hedge her hair might have suggested to a passer the classic golden fleece. But the road was so unfrequented that it was not probable that there would be a passer.

Hark! is that the muffled tread of an unshod mustang coming nearer and nearer? Is some one's eye destined to catch a sight of this golden fleece? Whose? We shall see.

The process of hair-drying being tedious, and the air soothing, Angela had glided into a gentle doze. Suddenly, however, she felt herself awaked by an odd sensation, as if something were tugging at the ends of her hair. She did not open her drowsy lids, but, flinging her arm behind her head, lazily attempted to lift the tresses from the intruder's grasp. In vain. A

renewed jerk; it must be Bidal. "Won't I give her Je-rusalem fits!" Another jerk. This time she raised her head. What did she see? Not Bidal, but a young man in Mexican dress, who, standing upright in his stirrups, paused a moment after she raised her head to waft a kiss with his riding-gauntlets, then off he galloped like lightning on his pony. But the caballero had left a *souvenir* behind him, for a note was fastened to the end of one of her long locks. What difference to Angela if heart were spelled "harte" and soul "sole"? She was not choice, and, like others of her sex, she was pleased by boldness.

After this he came often, riding by like the wind, pausing, if all were secure, to exchange a greeting. Once he dismounted, and with his hunting-knife cut off a lock of her yellow hair, and made

her swear that, when he came next time, she would "skedaddle" with him. Willingly enough she assented to the mad proposal. Her mind, having been fed upon tales of lawless adventure, conceived of an elopement as of an heroic achievement, the crowning event of a girl's life.

Ardent protestations were breathed by the cavalier to the girl, who leaned over the roof of the portál to listen—promises of bracelets, brooches, necklaces, and such paraphernalia as lay nearer Angela's heart than anything else in the world. But alas for the Romeos and Juliets of life! Wedded love presents a new and startling chapter, wherein the most daring lover cuts oftentimes but a sorry figure.

On a clear June night, when there was no moon, but a wonderful display of

stars, Angela leaped from the top of the portál into the arms of Bobby Prentiss, who, placing her behind him on his mustang, galloped off with her into the darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

ON a vast plateau sits Denver. From under the shade of its two thousand cotton-wood trees it looks westward towards a wall, piled high and irregular against the sky. This wall is one of the Rocky Mountain ranges, which carries far up into the clouds a magnificent chain of peaks, arabesqued with snow in midsummer. Without the cotton-wood, Denver would be merely the inhabited corner of an arid plain. Attracted by its leafy tops, showers, refreshing as a kiss of Heaven, occasionally visit this once rainless region. In close serried ranks these trees stand

on the edge of their irrigating trenches, into which every morning water is turned, fresh from the distant Platte. So by artificial means this sandy soil, at one time capable only of bearing miles upon miles of thorny cactus, is now wooed into blossoming. Each morning the thirsty grass drinks up the supply of water allotted to it by man, and smiles back its gratitude in emerald lustrous as could be found in a nobleman's park or on the Devon downs.

Though Denver, at the time of which we write, had only been four years a capital, it was a typical Western metropolis. The very air, dry and crisp, was full of expectation. The sun, shining with a tropic brilliance through the thinnest ether on the stretch of sandy plain, gives it the aspect of a waveless sea on the east; while on the west, it brings out with an

architectural boldness those purple reliefs of mountain, whose dazzling snow-gulches look like Titanic pocket-handkerchiefs spread out to bleach.

Then everything was brand new. The people were all new. If you questioned the fruiterer selling California plums at the street-corner as to your whereabouts, he would reply, "I dunno; I ain't been here long." If you appealed to the clerk who sold you your dog-skin riding-gloves, from behind the counter of the dry goods store, she would shake her head and make answer, "I am a stranger myself; I came here because the doctors told me that I could not hold out six months if I stayed East." The hotel clerks were more ignorant of topography than the tourists themselves. But those were picturesque times. People brought together from all quarters of the world by all kinds of

fantastic hopes — some seeking an El Dorado of fortune, others an El Dorado of health. In those days there was nothing conventional, nothing conservative; all were seekers, and seekers after something new. Men changed the habits and traditions of a lifetime. Washerwomen became dowagers, gentlemen were metamorphosed into street-car drivers, and enjoyed the masquerade, while they waited for something to turn up. What good-humour prevailed. The smile on everybody's lip seemed to say, "Yes, I like it out here; don't you?" Notwithstanding the active life which presented serious questions, there were touches of gaiety, such as embroider the more quietly realistic lives of those who belong to the older civilization of the East, but here the gaiety was wilder, less trammeled by laws of caste. No one stopped to inquire who

his neighbour might be. It was well they did not, for a notorious black-leg was at one time the leader of society. But young ladies cannot, of course, be expected to exist without germans, even in the bracing air of Colorado; so these young creatures romped about to music among some very questionable characters; and often their dancing was made the subject of bets, as if they were race-horses. It seemed as if Nature in this new part of the world drew her portraits in charcoal, a kind of free-hand drawing that produced broad and significant characterization.

Angela had told her tale with unthinking pathos; and the two men, listening in puzzled silence, came to understand that the silly little creature had married a man who was a speculator, gambler, desperado, all in one. But they hardly

realized that, on account of her obtuseness, she might have for ever remained in ignorance of these facts had she been a happy wife; but this she was not. For the first few weeks of wedded life, Prentiss made a plaything of Angela, showing her off to his companions, and delighting in their admiration of her and their envy of him. During those first weeks he loaded her with jewels, and swore that she was the handsomest piece of flesh in Colorado; but fire mingled with the blood bounding through his veins. He was not only reckless, but, at times, brutal. Their bridal tour was among the most reckless of the mining-camps—"Humbug," "Lucky Cuss," "No Count," "Bob Ingersoll," "Fourth of July," as these places are called in the miners' grotesque nomenclature.

At Leadville the finale came. One

night, Prentiss having lost at gambling, came back to the hotel at midnight, crazed with drink and fury.

"What's that you're doing, you imp of Satan?" was his greeting to his bride, who stood in front of the looking-glass taking an earring from her ear. It caught, so she did not turn at his words, nor answer.

"Yes, you white and yellow gipsy, it's you that brings me the devilish luck I get. You are caught, eh?" (for Angela was frightened now, and he saw her eyes widen and look back at him from the mirror, while her hands were paralyzed, without power to undo the little gold hook piercing the ear's lobe)—"scared, eh? Come, I'll undo those blasted ear-drops. I gambled for the money that got them; I'll have them too. Come, a husband must help a wife, mustn't he?"

Prentiss strode up behind her, sending his reeking breath over the little shivering white, mute creature. In an instant he grasped her by her hair, and would have torn the diamonds, twinkling on their golden hooks, down through the flesh that held them; but now she resisted, slipped from his arms, and, in the midst of a shower of curses, fled through the door, which she closed and locked behind her, into the narrow, dark corridor of the hotel, where she stumbled and fell against a man coming up the staircase. This man was Lucius Lillehammer, manager of an opera-troupe.

"My soul and body, who is this?" cried the manager, supporting with his arm a lovely young woman, dishevelled, out of breath, and colourless as a white rose. "God bless my stars, if it ain't Prentiss's pretty little devil of a wife,

and all but scared out of her wits. What ails you, my darling? I can't abide to see you so flustered. Has Prentiss been after you again?"

"He says that he's going to tear my eyes out and my tongue, because I bring him bad luck. I'm afeared of him for my life. I daresn't go where he is. I didn't run off until he'd got a handful of my hair."

"The devil he did," was Lillehammer's comment; and he drew the truant to a seat in the window, whence one could look afar over mountains that showed above the timber line, and down into a narrow street ending in a snow-gulch. For a moment you might have thought yourself in the loftiest of the Swiss valleys; but those blazing gambling-palaces, and the hubbub in the street even at this late hour, made you know that you

were in one of the most bizarre towns of the stirring West; a city of the clouds, its twenty-five thousand inhabitants a medley made up of millionaires, pioneers, club-men and adventurers. A city, did we say? No; it could be a mining-camp and nothing more if it numbered a hundred thousand inhabitants; a composite society permeated with primitiveness and fashion, with rudeness and luxury.

"I tell you what; I wouldn't stand that fellow Prentiss, if I was you."

Lillehammer confronted the girl, who crouched in the window-seat. He was enjoying the mountains, the moonlight, and the melodrama with the keenness of a professional; feeling as if this hall window were a proscenium-box for which he had paid five dollars in order to view a touching scene. One's profession *will* colour one's perceptions.

"I ain't agoing to stand him; but I—I don't know where to go. I daresn't go back to the Sisters. I daresn't go home."

She buried her head in her hands with abandon, and appeared to be thinking, though in reality she was not.

"Why don't you earn your wherewithals by that sweet voice of yours, Mrs. Prentiss?" said the manager, tentatively. "You sing like a canary. How would you like to star it in my troupe, eh?"

"Oh, Mr. Lillehammer! oh, wouldn't I! Will you?" was Angela's reply, and she slid down upon her knees at Lillehammer's feet. She was rich in striking poses not restrained by the sense of dignity.

"Well, we'll see, we'll see," returned the manager, throwing an astringent quality into his voice, and receding from his proposition in proportion as he saw her warm

to it. But the ignorant, credulous, unsophisticated creature believed any one who whispered a kindly word in her ear.

The next day recorded her flight, Prentiss's pursuit, and his capture of her valise with its cargo of trinketry, which left her destitute of everything in the world saving her gifts of beauty and voice. It is no wanton brush that paints the portrait of Angela. She is represented, not as she appeared to the fanatical vision of Westover, nor to the form-loving eye of Harrison, but as, in all her literalness, she would strike the sensibilities of the moralist. Under the microscope, film is a rope-fibre, butterflies' wings coarse; so to the nice perception of the moralist half-veiled defects stand forth in all their grossness, half-fledged virtues in their potentiality. He looks behind flesh and blood, instinct, impulse, custom, form, to

find the possibilities of virtue, and, if it must be so, the possibilities of vice.

Westover had some of this fineness of perception, but he lacked the quality of moderation, which is to the soul what rhythm is to poetry, and proportion to architecture; as you wish to be a wholly beautiful being, study to get moderation. Westover had about him a splendid go, not called out in his everyday life, and its overflow showed itself in lack of moderation; for every evil grows out of some virtue, and is related to it, as shadow is to substance.

Angela was not one of the women who fall to pieces in a day of car-travel; her flesh was so solid that it kept smoothing out her garments and pressing them into an exact fit over plump shoulder and hips. When the car-whistle announced Denver, she rubbed a square of window-pane

and strove to view herself therein, turning this way and that. Vain effort; the imperfect mirror yielded only disappointment.

With a laugh, Harrison drew from its Russian-leather case a gentleman's pocket-mirror, which he offered with the words, "This is what you want, isn't it?"

Something distressingly like "splucious" whizzed from her lips, and she seized the mirror with undisguised rapture. She did obeisance, tossing up the golden fountain of her hair with utmost seriousness. To the words from Harrison, "Come, Mrs. Prentiss, you are perfect as you are. We must hurry; and look at Westover; he's in a terrible hurry, like a bottle of ale beginning to fizz," she answered, with a laugh and the question, "Say, do I look tony?"

"Very," the latter replied, with grim

conciseness, and he began gathering up the wraps. Harrison laughed; he could not help it. But Westover said—

"Do you know any place at which you would wish to stay?"

"No; I hadn't thought—I don't know where. I haven't got a copper to my name. Tell me what must I do?"

The moment for action had come, and it scared her.

"I think I can recommend a private boarding-house, kept by a Mrs. Shurtleff, a good woman; would you like to go there? I know her, and can introduce you."

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, do, please."

She had no power of forecasting, and shrank from taking up the burden of life alone; for if she had courage, it was the courage of ignorance. Westover led the way to a house not far from the main

street. They rang the bell; and, Mrs. Shurtleff herself answering it, he engaged in some conversation with her inside the door, while Angela and Harrison were left without in the porch. She preferred, infinitely, his smiling countenance to Westover's more taciturn visage, and she said now, in a saucy whisper—

"I'm a-going to be lonesome, won't you come to see me—a heap—even if t'other one won't?" She indicated, with her fore-finger, Westover, the jut of whose fine head, with its close-clipped dark hair, could be seen just within the doorway. Instinct told her that "t'other one" would not be so readily intoxicated by beauty. She pulled Harrison's sleeve in her desire for notice, and repeated, "Oh, do, do, do come to see me heaps and heaps, I'll be that lonesome here."

And Harrison hastily answered, "Yes."

After a few minutes Mrs. Shurtleff turned towards Angela, saying that she believed she had one room which could be placed at the lady's disposal. It had been engaged by some one else—a gentleman, "but he has changed his mind," she added, after they went upstairs, by way of accounting for the masculine traps that lay about the room. These, however, were unceremoniously cleared away, in order to make place for Angela; then Westover, after a few more whispered words with Mrs. Shurtleff, made her understand that it was not necessary for Mrs. Prentiss to know that he was the gentleman who had changed his mind.

"Do not be uneasy about your new boarder," he added, placing a week's payment within her hand.

"Oh no, to be sure not,' returned the

landlady, amiably, but hugging the note with her five fingers; "any one that comes recommended by you is all right, Mr. Westover."

Out of the house, and of the reach of Angela's beseeching eyes, the reaction came. Westover thrust his hands into the depths of his pockets, exclaiming—

"Well, this is what I call a disagreeable piece of business."

Harrison laughed, as he said—

"It was deuced handsome of you to give up your room in that way."

"The next thing to do—is to get rid of her," rejoined Westover, giving the lie to his generosity by his words.

"Not until we have seen Lillehammer; you remember, we promised to do that," suggested Harrison.

"*You* promised, perhaps," was the reply.

"Come, come, let's go halves," proposed Harrison, good-naturedly. "I confess this is one of the neatest little adventures I ever figured in, and I must admit that I'm eaten up with curiosity to know how she's—she's going to turn out, poor thing; she's absolutely without a change of clothes, too. If she is to do herself justice in the eyes of Lillehammer, she ought to have another dress." Harrison had a weakness for a handsome woman in a handsome dress. "She has only that pathetic blue; don't you think we ought to give her a new one?"

"A thousand times no!" Westover shouted. "No, Harrison, or I wash my hands of Mrs. Prentiss altogether. Such ill-judged kindness would be ruin to her. She must receive nothing from us, except such assistance as will put her in the way of making an honest support honestly."

As Westover had intimated, the reporter, so lately their travelling companion, was a man who stopped at nothing, and when the two friends, after their return to Denver, read in the columns of the *Tribune* a report headed in this startling fashion, "Runs away with another Man's Wife," after which an enumeration of hairbreadth escapes, hand-to-hand combats, and like adventures, they recognized the hand that produced the tale.

"I'll give him a thrashing," threatened Harrison, raising his arm quickly; but it was the sprained arm, and he was obliged to let it fall with a glower of helpless pain.

"Let it blow over," advised Westover. "Take it quietly, and it will blow over in nine days."

But it had blown too far, having been copied into newspapers the length and breadth of the country, and a letter came

after a couple of weeks, which Harrison perused with a frowning brow.

"DEAR MR. HARRISON (it ran),

"After what has recently transpired, it will be hardly necessary for me to explain my motives for breaking an engagement which, it seems, you had already regarded as null and void. In spite of the shock which I have received, and the mortification attached to the publicity of the affair, I shall endeavour to remember only that which was noble in you, as well as to forget that which was otherwise. Of course, I cannot wish you happiness in your present position; I wish for you something better, more wholesome—something which must precede happiness, and that is, repentance. Without reproach, I subscribe myself,

"Always your well-wisher,

"BONNIBEL GRAFTON."

Five years before, Harrison would have torn his hair at receiving such a letter from his betrothed, the dark-eyed Miss Grafton; but with such as he, absence has power to chill. Now he puckered his forehead, perusing his lady-love's choice caligraphy; now he muttered a smothered imprecation over the word "repentance," coyly shaken off from the dainty nib of Miss Grafton's pen; but he stuck at the conclusion "without reproach," and ended by tossing the letter wrathfully upon Westover's desk, for they were seated in his office.

"See what that devil of a reporter has done for me!" he exclaimed.

"Well," said Westover, calmly, after he had read the letter, "all you have to do is to write and explain."

"Write and explain! that is a pretty joke. You know, my good fellow, that I

cannot write a syllable on account of this confounded sling." He looked up ruefully, and met a glance of quizzical interrogation in his friend's eyes. "Come, you will be goose-quill for me, won't you? Just write to that cruel cousin of yours, and tell her what an abominable scrape I am in; put your eloquence *de billet* into practise, for once in your life, in my behalf." Harrison turned away grumbling in an undertone, "I will be willing to wager a good deal that that fellow Brodnax she writes so much about is at the bottom of this."

Westover laughed as he continued to eye his friend with keen, quick glances, reminding him, at the same time, that he was not lucky in wagers.

"Hal Brodnax is a cousin of mine," he continued, musingly. "I have not seen him for nearly ten years, but he promised

to make a fine fellow then. Wouldn't it be strange if he were to take a fancy to marry another of my cousins? But she must be some five or six years older than he."

"Strange!" echoed Harrison, turning on his heel and approaching his friend with choleric fire in his steel-blue eyes—"strange! Upon my word, that's a cool way of putting it to me. It seems a good deal more than strange to be jilted after a five years' engagement, even though it be your lordship's cousin who flings me the mitten; but"—with a mock sigh—"every one can cure a grief but him who has it."

"Come, Harrison," cried Westover, "if you can quote Shakespeare your heart's in a sound condition, rely on that. I do not believe that a mitten despatched by her hand will inflict a blow that will hurt you. Few people can stand the test of absence;

and, if you will pardon me for saying so, Harrison, I do not believe that either you or Cousin Bonnibel belong to that number."

Harrison seated himself in a chair, drew down his brows and the corners of his mouth, and tried to look first angry, then miserable, as he hummed a doleful tune to the accompaniment of a tattoo on his friend's writing-table.

"You do not understand," he began loftily; then, "You do not give a poor fellow a crumb of justice." Then, looking up suddenly and seeing twinkles in Westover's eye, he broke out with, "I declare, old boy, I don't know but what you are right, as you always are; so just lend me your right hand, and help me to make a clean breast of this ugly business, as becomes an honest man and a gentleman."

Westover drew a sheet of paper toward him, dipped his pen in ink, carefully set down the date, and, turning toward his friend, said—

"What shall I write?"

"Write! why, write—why, just write—I'll be blest if I know what you must write!" ejaculated the discarded suitor, springing up from his chair impatiently, in order to pace up and down the room.

"It must be delicate," suggested Westover.

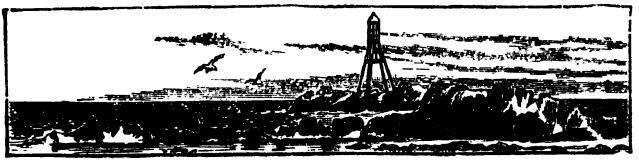
"Just so," replied Harrison, pausing in his rapid walk.

"And direct," continued Westover, still holding his brand new gold pen suspended over the paper.

"Exactly," cried Harrison, buoyantly. "I see you have the idea. Now write it all down, just as you have told it to me—delicate"—Harrison picked up his hat—

"and direct, you know." He opened the door, pausing for a moment on the threshold, as he added, "There isn't a fellow in the United States that understands the value of those two words better than you do. Now fire away!"

The door closed on Harrison's retreating form, and that night the letter went.



CHAPTER V.

SEVERAL days after their arrival in Denver, Harrison and Westover brought Lillehammer to see their *protégée*, and to try her voice, hoping to draw him into making an engagement with her.

It was evening when they entered Mrs. Shurtleff's parlour; but, in spite of the gloominess which gaslight only partially broke, Angela dispensed around her the savour of spring when it is on the verge of summer; the bloom of the south when it breaks away from the chaste self-restraint of the temperate zone, and bounds into tumultuous growths. She was arrayed

in the dark blue gown which Harrison called pathetic, because her only one. Her sole ornaments eyes softly blue as a patch of heaven breaking through partings in white clouds, and a mass of hair that first sketched a milk-white line upon the temples, then dropped into gold rings upon the forehead, and gold necklaces upon the throat.

How narrow the line dividing beauty from ugliness! Had her lips pouted an iota more, they might have suggested the negroid; had her cheek-bones been but a trifle higher, they might have given the sensual cast to her features. Her full humid eyes, *à fleur de tête*, were set for looking around objectively upon the world without a single introspective gleam—had they been a little more prominent, the harmonies would have fled; but no, Nature had forborne to mark this daugh-

ter with extremes. As yet the beholder could see in Angela's countenance no quality more offensive than voluptuousness —the voluptuousness of a rose, or a child dimly conscious of self.

"Oh, Mr. Lillehammer, don't you recollect me?" She tripped forward to meet this gentleman, holding out both hands.

"Certainly, madam, certainly."

Mr. Lillehammer drew back now with a prudent coolness, for he realized that the present interview was to be a business one, and very different from the last, which bordered on the romantic. To be sure, he had then made overtures, but he had no idea that she would seriously consider the acceptance of his proffer, carelessly enough made in the moonlit hall of the Hotel Leadville. Now he must keep his head cool as beseems a stage-manager noted for making good bargains.

"Ain't you glad to see me shut of Bobby Prentiss?"

Mr. Lillehammer bowed acquiescence. He was a nonpareil of a manager, and could assume the manners of a gentleman with facility, seeing that he had none of the substantial qualifications of that caste about him.

"You teased me to run away and join your troupe then, so here I am, large as life, and I want you to give me a place—A—number one in your company; do you hear?"

Harrison and Westover, in the background, watched her with grave concern as she continued—

"Don't you remember of telling me that my voice beat your s'pran'y all hollow?"

This was a direct question, to which Mr. Lillehammer replied with ceremonious caution—

"To be sure, madam, I recollect distinctly of pronouncing your voice a fresh one—a very fresh one."

"Shall I sing?"

She was vaguely alarmed by this caution and coolness. She had expected him to be as caressing as he had been in the moonlit hall of the Hotel Leadville; but moonlight is the antithesis of gaslight, and moods change as they are lighted by one or the other, for this is a world of seeming rather than of being. The idea, however, had penetrated her dull mind that she must show off all the allurements she was mistress of.

"Sister Josefa at Lorette learned me heaps and heaps of songs; she useter say I was her brag voice. I was the only one as ever sung the volunteers in the chapel service."

Mr. Lillehammer might have smiled at

the thought of one of his singers being trained by the old-fashioned Sisters of the Convent of Lorette, but he refrained; he was turning facts over in his mind. His soprano was ill; an inefficient substitute was taking her place and demanding a high price for bad work. What if he should take this girl and have her trained for the next opera? True, she was without experience, but her voice *was* divine, and she *might* make a bewitching little star; he was not afraid of ventures. He gave no evidence of the conclusion he was reaching other than by squeezing up his shrewd buttonhole eyes and peering at the poor girl from the hem of her robe to the bows on her corsage, and from the bows on her corsage to the top of her head. As the engineer calculates with his eye the mountain's height, so the manager was trying to measure the merits

of this new candidate. Like the masses which he represented, his war-cry was "Popularity," which, after all, is only a demand for more Satan.

"Yes, sing for me, madam," ordered Lillehammer, sitting down in a plush arm-chair, stretching out his legs, and dangling his eye-glass with a critic's look.

Angela sat down to the piano, and began a prelude. She was but an indifferent musician, and the instrument wheezy. The piano gives us music's prose; the violin, its lyric poetry; the organ, its drama; the flute, its hymns and pæons of the epic character. Angela's education had been of a very old-fashioned kind, presided over by the Italian Euterpe; and the good ladies of Lorette had communicated to their pupil expression which was not of the controlled modern kind, but a wild, heated, and rather rattling

passion. She sent forth a lark from her lips, this little woman, whose wealth lay in silver notes and gold curls; and she was neither slangy nor common when she sang. Her voice gushed forth from the dark blue bodice, and shook itself out of the lips, as who should say? A voice is itself a personality. It can thrill, stir, conquer, like Napoleon, without the aid of prosody; it is above civilization; it appeals to the savant and savage; it is the language, not of the lips, but of the soul. What millions of money it has whisked out of men's pockets! This was the climax. When reached, it made Lillehammer cry out—

"Quite good, madam. A little more bravura, I would suggest; bravura brings the house down." "Cursed impetuosity!" he said to himself the next moment. "If I am to make a bargain I must hold my

tongue still; but, the mischief take me! I always do forget the professional when I see a pretty woman; they are so rare, I had begun to think beauty was out of date." Then came reflection number two. "If I lose my head, why shouldn't other men? An audience can lose its head too."

"Her fortune is made," thought the sanguine Harrison.

"She has a gift," thought Westover; and he glanced exultingly at the manager.

"Say, wull my voice do? Don't you like it?"

Angela wheeled around on the piano-stool, and looked at her judge. An escaped lock suggested to Harrison that sister-curl struck off in its pride of beauty by the outlaw Prentiss.

"She has a good mezzo—very good," began Lillehammer, in cautious doublets.

"It is very trainable—very." The idea was passing through his mind as to how cheap a bargain he might make with her, and he was *gêné* by Westover's watchful glance. "Her music is not what you would call cultivated, but her voice has compass, freshness. She has no experience; but I believe that she has—yes, we will say, some talent," pronounced the manager, opening his mouth, full of large white teeth, upon the subject of this moderate compliment. He rose and took out his watch. "We will see, we will see," he added condescendingly, using the plural pronoun with an assumption of royalty.

Mr. Lillehammer believed that the secret of power lay in inspiring awe. He had all sorts of classes and conditions in his troupe. He used everything that came within his reach, and he ruled with

a rod of iron. Just now, like the fox, he was doubling, in order to draw his pursuers into terms that should be agreeable to himself.

He rose to go, but when he reached the door a little trembling shriek startled him into a sudden turn of his ponderous body. Angela was on her knees close to him, her hands laying hold of the ends of his coat.

"Oh, Mr. Lillehammer, I believe you are going back on me; an' you as good as promised me in Leadville. Don't go away without a word. You must—you must—you must engage me. I'll die right off if you don't."

She went through numerous phases of feeling, and the manager stood still, struck by a certain dramatic insistence, not without power. He put on his glasses and examined her with the grave interest of a

connoisseur, as she knelt, her bosom palpitating, her arms thrown upward, her head lifted, beseeching.

"My dear Mrs. Prentiss," he said, still doubling, "your inexperience! It would take months, you know."

But Angela waited for no more. Overcome by disappointment, she raised her handkerchief to her eyes and deliberately burst into tears.

Then she threw herself on the horsehair sofa between the two windows, nestled her head against its shiny black cushion, which formed an ebon frame for her young bright beauty, and went on crying as comfortably as possible. Harrison made a motion towards her, but Westover held him back, turning at the same time towards Mr. Littlehammer, to whom he said—

"Pray do not think that we would have

you do anything against your business interests. There is, I am told, a very good company forming now in Kansas City; so, if Mr. Lillehammer has made up his mind, would it not be best to consider the matter settled, and put an end to an interview which must be painful in the extreme to the lady." He waved his hand towards Angela's recumbent form.

For the first time Mr. Lillehammer was seen to hesitate.

"If Mrs. Prentiss is willing, I might try her for a month, during which time she could study a new part and fill minor positions, or substitute."

He spoke with business-like deliberation, simulating an expression of doubt as he surveyed the girl, whose face underwent a transformation. She looked up from the dingy horsehair lounge, and sprang forward, crying out—

"Oh, Mr. Lillehammer, try me! you'll like me splendid—'deed you will. I am set on the stage; see if I don't draw a house, you bet!"

"If she could be induced to hold her tongue, she might pass for a seraph," thought Harrison.

"She is fit for singing, walking across the stage, showing off a costume," thought Lillehammer.

Yes, the machine was perfect, and the manager already beheld it in the dress of the Mascot.

"The lips of a cherub, the tongue of a plough-boy," thought Westover, glancing at the *protégée* with troubled eyes. "Why can she not be sent to school? she should be made to parse." He turned towards the manager, whom he essayed to pin to terms.

"Ah!"—the manager coughed—"Am I

to understand that these gentlemen are speculating in your voice, madam ?"

Lillehammer's words, pronounced with frigid politeness, were addressed to Angela, but his look was upon the Virginians. Harrison reddened, and was for interrupting him; but Westover said quickly and coolly—

"Well, suppose we are speculating in the lady's voice; it is a question of business all the same, you know."

Lillehammer deferred. Westover politely insisted; but the former would not budge. He agreed to try Mrs. Prentiss for a month with minor *rôles*, and the learning of a *prima donna's* part later on, after which he would define terms. At the conclusion of much slippery politeness, and a harangue of wonderfully clever vagueness, he said, "Good night," preparatory to taking his leave.

"I think we shall come out all right, Mrs. Prentiss. Just be patient. We shall see, Mrs. Prentiss, we shall see."

"Prentiss? None of your Prentiss for me," she interrupted. "I ain't agoing to have a roofian like Bobby Prentiss coming it over me with his name, or any of his nonsense. You must put me down Angela Cloud on your playbills, Mr. Lillehammer; do you hear?"

The manager bowed and withdrew. Westover also rose, and then, more reluctantly, Harrison; but the lady demurred.

"Don't go, Mr. Wustover; don't go, Mr. Hairison." She burred every *r* in their names with utmost care. "Let's set down by the fire and have a good time. Oh, won't it be jolly to be a—a primma-domini?"

She laughed, and so did the others. To check the hilarity, Westover said—

"I congratulate you from my heart upon this first step to success, Mrs. Cloud."

"Don't call me Mrs. Cloud"—she put fingers into both ears—"or I won't listen. That's my name for the playbills; it sounds so formal-like"—she drew the corners of her mouth down—"an' primmy"—she twiddled her thumbs, affecting demureness. "Call me Aingy; they did at Lorette, an' I like it—it sounds comfortable an' homelike. Ah"—bursting into gravity—"you two hev' been so kind! How come you to—to a poor girl like me?"

In spite of the strain of pathos which played about her tone, Westover's moustache fluttered over a scarcely repressed smile, while Harrison stretched his blue eyes almost beyond recovery, at the petition, "Call me Aingy." The former answered—

"Impossible! Don't you see how impossible such familiarity would be? We wish to be your friends, Mrs. Cloud; and we should harm you instead did we forget that you are a married woman and situated in the most delicate of positions, because separated from your husband and rightful protectors."

Truly Angela Cloud was not born for freedom; her safety lay in the seclusion of the seraglio.

"Be careful, very careful, and tell no one what you have told us."

There is no satire so bitter as truth, but no counsel could prevail upon this embryo woman to feel any sense of responsibility. Compelled by the young man's earnestness, she sat quite still during this speech, her feet crossed, her hands in her lap, folded, her lashes shadowing her cheeks. He was only aware of its futility when,

having ceased speaking, he saw her look up slyly to catch Harrison's eye; then she put a question, the suddenness of which stung Westover into impetuous movement toward the door, and Harrison into an ironical "Ha! ha!"

"Sho' pop, now, Mr. Hairison, is t'other one a preacher? I'll bet 'most anything" —giving a whistled note to imply how much.

"Don't waste a bet in your present state of—of—ahem!—straitened circumstances," said Harrison, lightly. "Westover, who sits over there staring at us as solemn as a judge, is no more a preacher than I am. Would you take me for one?"

Angela laughed in a puzzled way, but shook her head. To Harrison's information, given in the single murmured word "Insurance," she opposed "Ashoorance,"

repeated once or twice in an ecstasy of good humour. It was her good humour that was perpetually suggesting a warm heart behind it.

After a series of "ha-ha's!" Harrison iterated, "Assurance? You have hit it off rarely well, Mrs. Cloud; Westover can't gainsay that. What do you say to a plain business man who is a high-flyer on the tight-rope of theory, a man who rebels against colleges and associations, who lives his own life in the most violently fantastical manner?"

Angela's thought stood still on the word "tight-rope," then flew to memories of acrobats she had seen in the little mining town which had given her birth; but Westover's found in his friend's flamboyant phraseology a grain of truth which hurt. It rubbed against his nice perception, as the grain of sand does against

the delicate membrane of the eye. One of his points of wisdom consisted in alertness in the direction of his own shortcomings. Harrison, perhaps, did not appreciate the fact that it is often the business men of a community who give the cordial welcome to intellectual discovery rather than the professional men. These last, being impregnated with the accepted and the classical, are afraid of new standards, and the birth of every new standard implies that great spirits have met, touched, and been divinely thrilled.

Westover was in constant struggle with the Zeit-geist. He rose from his chair, now, shrugged his shoulders carelessly—a movement which in him suggested magnificent reserves—and gave the signal for departure. Then they were both made aware of Angela's presence by her voice, sounding the tremolo, as she said—

"You hev been awful kind and good to me, both of you. Say, what could I have done all by my lone? I never had any real friends before, cep'n Sister Josefa, at Lorette; but she was always telling her beads, and so I got tired waiting for her to say things, you know. Ah! but it's sech a comfort to hev real live friends" —she drew a sigh—"You make me know more about myself than ever I knew before." Oh, the mystery of ignorance, the sacredness of beauty, the sublimity of knowledge! How subtile the inter-dividing lines! She pursued, "I wush you would call me Aingy; Sister Josefa called me that. It would sound so nice and home-like."

Westover shook his head, and laid his hand on Harrison's arm. "No, no; but we will come and see you sometimes, and be your friends. Good night, Mrs.

Cloud;" and "Good night, Mrs. Cloud," echoed Harrison, as they went from the room.

At the foot of the stairs they caught the trills of a lightly caroled song, and the words, "Good night, beloved, good night." It was Angela going up to bed, singing as she went.

"That girl, woman, being, creature—I don't know what to call her—has two peerless gifts, beauty and music; but I don't believe she has anything in her to back them. Perilous, peerless; if she has not, better that she had never been born," ejaculated Westover, fitting his hat to his head, as they stepped out into the night air.

"It seems to me that she would suit the *rôle* of a milkmaid better than that of a *prima donna.* 'Call me Aingy.' Only think of it, Meade!" and Harrison's "Ha!

ha!" broke the street's silence. "I don't mean a common milkmaid—a boor; but such a one as you might find in the Valhalla or in Arcadia during the Golden Age."

CHAPTER VI.

GREAT changes were in order for Angela Cloud. Through Westover's determined efforts the engagement with Lillehammer was effected, and the early days of February saw her name upon the playbills, which announced the "Mascotte" as the opera to begin the Denver season. To a sensitive nature, the expectation of appearing before the footlights might have been accompanied with nervous dread; but Angela did not know that she possessed nerves in that round little body of hers. A nature spontaneous, yet not

impulsive; not emotional exactly, and yet possessed of certain accessibilities of the blood-vessels. You might have given her a faun for one parent; her beauty the gift of some blue-eyed naïad bubbling over with youth and laughter, and beloved by the stupid faun. No doubt, in the survival of ancient types, we see sometimes the half-soul, or the soul just a degree or two above the classic faun's. Was this true of Angela? Was she capable of a grief for which consolation could not be found in food or sleep? Joy is sufficient for arousing the sensitive soul in its sphere of instinct: sorrow is the awakener of the intellective in its sphere of spirit.

With regard to the girl in question, doubts presented themselves; for a child-woman is as exasperating as fascinating. Like the rest of the world, Westover and Harrison were partly deceived

by her sensuous charm, and judgment warred for awhile with the testimony of the senses.

The flying weeks which were training Angela for a new life, brought themselves to a pause on the 10th of February. Preparation was over, for this was the night of her *début*. She was alone in her room, leaning against the cherry woodwork of her bed, a hovering apparition outlined in the dusk. "Oh, you nitsy, bitsy, hatsy!" she lisped, taking from the counterpane, whereon was strewn the Mascotte's apparel, a befurbelowed hat; and setting it sidewise on her head, to consult the mirror, whistling good-naturedly to the reflection. Then she changed the hat from one side of her head to the other in search of effect, which when found, and stepping back a pace or two, she cried out in a flush of enthusiasm, "Go-li-ah! won't I make a hit!"

Night, thrusting his black poll in at the window, flung over her his dark veil; so removing the shepherdess hat from her head with care, she laid it down on the bed, gravely, as if it had been a living thing, flew to the gas-burner, whose jet she turned on full; then, with the aid of chips swung into the embers of the fire-place, she created an illumination in the dusk. Gleams of light fleered upon the white-washed walls, blushed upon the cherry-wood furniture, sparkled about the crystal goblet and cut-glass toilet bottles of the bureau. Angela, looking into its square mirror, smiled at the brilliancy diffused. Twilight might make a saint of her; fire and gaslight must bring her back to earth again—a Magdalene—one of Titian's, but before the repentance, for this face was too *debonaire* to suit a saint's.

Now was come that most absorbing act in the epoch of the toilet—dressing the hair, no slight task where the tresses tumble about in such rich profusion as did Angela's. First she shook out her hair, then gathered it together into a mass coiled twice about her throat, an overflow of fringe-ends resting upon her white chemise-front. "I'll plait it in six," she said aloud to her reflection. Voicing thoughts in solitude is the evidence of energy in a child-nature. Her fingers flew to the task. She knew what she was about; for artistic impulses simmered in her bosom; and yet she only half knew her beauty's worth, not realizing in her ignorance of life that there were in the world sculptors who would have exclaimed, at sight of her, Madam, an hour in my atelier is worth a half-napoleon to you;" or, "Sit for my

Psyche; the contours may be Oriental Greek, but they will do admirably;" or, "Stand for my Goddess of Liberty; such firmly planted feet, such perfect balance. Pose for me, for my sake, the salon's, Art's."

Does Heaven allow beauty to run to waste? The flower unconsciously gives to man God's message. How about the human flower in whom consciousness of self has only partly waked? What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and find not himself? Perhaps of all the budding *prima donna's* friends, Westover was the only one who concerned himself with this problem.

Night, scared away by gas and fire, jerked his head out of her bedroom window, and fetched now lights of his own which twinkled spare and clear in the blue-black empyrean. He was biding his time, ready to devour her with all those

eyes of his when she should show herself out of doors. Just as the *prima donna* had clapped the straw hat on her head for the twentieth time, there came a knock at her door, and a voice saying through the keyhole, shrilly, "There's two gentlemen below as wants to see you, mem."

Westover and Harrison had supplied the *prima donna* with her outfit. Long and seriously had they consulted as to the most delicate way of doing it, for one of the two was principled against giving presents. But on this occasion generosity was necessary, for their *protégée* was entirely without means.

"Of course she must make a first-class impression on the night of her *début*," Westover began, with businesslike simplicity. "We will advance her the sum necessary for her outfit."

"Advance fiddlestick!" interrupted Harrison, who loved to throw away money. "Have you the heart, you brutal fellow, to propose a business arrangement with that rose-coloured creature? You might as well set up a bank account with an April cloud or—or a June rose, you know; indeed you might;" and Harrison sent off an airy kiss from his two fingers.

"If you let this—this creature," stammered Westover, not finding the precise word he wanted, "make a fool of you——"

"Say angel, not creature," threw in Harrison; "it will be so much more polite, you know;" and he took off his hat with a mocking smile and bowed low.

"A robust angel, I should say, judging from the amount of meat and bread I have seen her put away. But I suppose her digestion is rose-coloured too."

Harrison laughed again; he had been amused more than once by the fair Angela's gastronomic feats. He had seen her gulp down amazing quantities of underdone meat, but then she looked so pretty and pink and white after it was all over, that he soon forgot the shocking solidarity of her tastes, feeling as if beauty must require more nutriment than ugliness, and as if the underdone beef, which dissolved into nothing but the dewy blue of these eyes or into the dewy red of these lips, possessed a poetic quality after all.

"Remember the angels that visited Abraham, and be not profane; appetite is scriptural—a thing of God's making."

"Now, Harrison, if you go and fall in love with that girl, and try to marry her——"

"Marry!"

"Yes; she might get a divorce, you know."

Harrison drew down his mouth-corners with an air of theatrical demureness, as he said, "Fall in love with her I may—I'm always in love; it's my chronic condition, as you know, you iceberg—but marry her, that is quite another variation of love's melody, and I have no desire to learn it."

The two men sat down in the parlour of Mrs. Shurtleff's boarding-house, each showing interest in his own peculiar way.

"I hope she will not keep us waiting long," began Harrison, as he sat for a while composedly on an expensively upholstered chair. Presently he sprang up, rushed across the room, and examined the face of a little clock smothered in plush on the mantelpiece. "Good heavens!

she's an hour late!" he ejaculated, fussily drawing his watch from his pocket as the standard of comparison.

"Can't you see, Harrison, that the clock has stopped?" Westover admonished in his exasperatingly quiet tone.

"Plague take boarding-house clocks!" and Harrison walked up and down the room, retailing impressions of the great *prima donnas* of the world.

"Don't talk any more about Patti," cautioned Westover at last, after listening to a deal of florid talk of this kind, "or you will be in no mood to criticize our *débutante* with justice. Sit down, do, and be quiet for ten minutes."

He drew a newspaper from his pocket and read intently, though, if the truth were told—the truth which this stubborn fellow never would have admitted to himself—he was not one whit less eager

than Harrison to see how their *protégée* was going to set off her theatrical costume; nay, there were other questions which came to his mind as he read the editorial over and over mechanically, without seeing a word of meaning in it, questions like these: Would she be successful? Would she be safe, she and her youth and beauty, alone in the world—worse than alone, for they are always safe who are guarded by the adamantine wall of intelligent purity? This thought kept multiplying and changing its key-note, until reverie was brought to an abrupt close by the presence of fact —fact in the person of Angela.

Into the room she tripped, humming the turkey-song, and dropped a curtsey in the midst of blushes. Unconsciously they rose, with a common instinct, and bowed low. It was the feeling of the true gentleman in the presence of exquisite womanhood.

This was the Mascotte's first applause, and, though silent, thrilled even her shallow bosom. Westover did not speak, but Harrison was inclined to noisy admiration.

"By Jupiter!"—running a rapturous gamut—"you'll do, Mrs. Cloud. Upon my soul, you will! Denver will lose its head to a man. You hold your fate in your hands—a large fate, if the hands *are* small."

Angela's bodice lent itself to a wave of laughter. She placed a hand on either hip, and, with sidelong glances, began to whistle, "I thee more than turkeys love." The operation of whistling was not unbecoming, but natural as piping to a linnet. Harrison whistled too, a running accompaniment; and thus encouraged, the girl kept time to the notes with her feet, her whole body swaying first this way,

then that way, in sympathetic rhythm. Westover retreated to the mantelpiece disgusted; for there, not only Angela, but Harrison was capering for all the world like a jointed doll.

"Are you also practising to burst upon the world in a ballet?" he inquired.

But Harrison vouchsafed no reply. His eyes were bent on the little Mascotte, who glowed with the exercise.

"You won't need rouge to-night." He turned his back on Westover, still glancing at the girl with his air of connoisseurship. "Your hair is auburn, your eyes cerulian, your cheeks vermilion, your teeth pearl, your neck alabaster. Isn't that correct?" appealing to his friend, who stood discreetly by, a spectator.

Angela did not comprehend the rigmarole, but she liked the coddling tone in which it was uttered. She pulled some

curls to pieces in front of the stingy allowance of mirror, shook them out, then recurled them, and it seemed as if each variation made them more becoming.

But there was no time for trifling. A clatter of wheels made itself heard in the quiet street, so song and dance came to an end. The friends saw the radiant young thing shut up in her carriage, saw it dash off in the direction of the theatre, then followed, more leisurely, on foot. Harrison whistled, as they walked, a kind of audible thinking, the strain from the "Mascot" which Angela had tossed from her lips five minutes before.

"Stop whistling, do, Clay," interrupted Westover at last. "Listen, won't you? Mrs. Cloud is now able to support herself. Let's gradually withdraw, leave her to a fate which our presence beside her will only mar."

"Gradually withdraw! leave her to her fate!" repeated Harrison, ending in a prolonged whistle, as he stood on the curbstone. "What! leave her to her fate now, just when she is beginning to be interesting? Not I."

"Do you call Angela Cloud interesting?" was the abrupt question.

"No, not interesting, but something vastly like it; we might call it so for the sake of convenience, you know." It was probable that he did not know what he meant, for he plunged both hands into pockets and struggled with thoughts. "Not interesting, perhaps," he went on, "but—— Why, man, we have just launched her upon the most dangerous career in the world for a woman; you have admitted that. To leave her to her fate now would be cruel."

Westover strode along silent and gloomy.

Harrison believed in himself; he believed that he was expressing the purest and most disinterested sentiments, but he was still under the influence of Angela's cheek-bloom and eye-brightness.

"We could not think of abandoning her now, just when she most needs a friend; it would not be prudent."

"Prudent," girned Westover—"mighty prudent for a man like you to turn champion, protector, 'friend,' as you call it, to a—a deucedly pretty woman, who is neither maid, wife, nor widow. I don't see that any greater danger presents itself in this 'career' you speak so disparagingly of."

"The friendship of a gentleman, I flatter myself, never comes amiss to any woman," was the answer, with full-blown dignity.

"Upon my word, Harrison, you do not think me such a confounded fool as to

swallow that nonsense. A man's friendship *is* dangerous to a woman who is not free to fall in love with him. Platonic friendship is a sham. You know how it works, in nine cases out of ten, as well as I do. It is unfair to take advantage of this girl's ignorance by establishing a claim upon her which, at best, will give *her* a doubtful position, and you too."

"I don't see that she is so ignorant of the world," said Harrison, musingly. "She has already passed through enough experiences for two or three ordinary women."

"Yes, but have these experiences opened her eyes? Of what use is experience except to the wise? She is—she is—yes, the loveliest creature I ever beheld, but she is also the most ignorant. It is not the experiences of life that arouse a man or a woman to responsibility; it is reflec-

tions upon them. Angela Cloud has never reflected."

"And never will," interrupted Harrison, lightly. "She is not a woman; she is a grown-up child, and that is her charm. That is why I can almost find it in my heart to love her."

"If she could be moulded," began Westover, musingly.

"Moulded," interrupted Harrison, shrugging—"moulded! You could as easily mould an April day. To mould would be to spoil her. She is as deliciously natural as a spring lamb, and, begging her lambship's pardon, as stupid."

"I thought you sneered at fatalism, Harrison. What do you call this?"

"My fatalism has limitations; yours has contradictions. I firmly believe, Westover, that you could fall in love with an ideal and be satisfied. My tempera-

ment calls for something different. I cannot be satisfied with anything short of flesh and blood; but it must be ambrosial flesh and blood, and—— "

"Angela Cloud has a husband," rejoined Westover, as if to check his friend's rhapsody.

A whizz of pain, keenly remembered, shot through the young man's right arm, where it had been hurt by that husband of Angela Cloud, but he fell to whistling softly again an air from the "Mascot."

They reached the theatre, and entered it as the curtain rose.

"I must keep an eye on him," thought Westover, "or he will make a fool of himself and of—her."

Then he raised his opera-glass and absorbed himself in the figures upon the stage. For him, however, there was but one figure—that of the *prima donna*. It

was the same with Harrison. For once he confined those truant glances to one.

"By Jove!" he cried, "her voice is as fresh as a mountain stream. Gad, she'll be a catch! Lillehammer was right; she'd be a good investment. Fire away, Westover! an encore to that turkey-song."

And they did fire away, both of them, and the theatre beside. They encored the little *débutante*, and brought her back, blushing, before the footlights. She sang again, and then she kissed her hand to the box wherein sat our Virginians.

"Come, we will escort her home," proposed Harrison, when the curtain fell.

In the lobby they awaited her. She came forward with the tenor and several others of the troupe. They talked noisily and laughed loudly.

"What a pity that she has such a loud voice in speaking!" thought Westover, leaning back in the shadow of the doorway to watch her. "Her voice is surpassing when she sings."

Harrison pressed forward to meet her, took her hand, and murmured something in her ear about "success," "fortune made," and being "proud of her." She turned towards him and smiled.

The actors dispersed. Then Westover emerged from his retreat and began, rather shyly, to mingle his congratulations with those of Harrison. The actress smiled again joyously; but the next moment, O *donna mobile!* her face was suffused with tears. Westover stopped, appalled. He had no conception of the shallowness of woman's tears. He thought they must represent something tragic. But Harrison knew better; he had as-

sisted at such scenes before. He was not surprised to see that her weeping was without effort, when a gush of warm drops sprang to her cheeks.

"Ah! you are nervous, excited, fatigued," he said kindly; "but, consider, you have nothing to worry you now, unless it is too much success, too much admiration, and I know you can stand that, eh?"

He drew out a fine cambric handkerchief and delicately whisked a tear-drop from her cheek. Westover, looking on, was astounded to behold the fit of weeping vanish under his friend's soothing as quickly as the April cloud that, driving across a soft blue sky, sends out a little flurry of drops in its passage, and it is gone; tears were dried in the sunbeam of a smile.

"Ah! I feel like my knees were a-running

away from the rest of me, 'deed and 'deed I do," cried Angela, leaning her sturdy young weight against Harrison. "I'm hongry, and I b'lieve that's what's the matter of me."

"Yes, you are exhausted; that's it," sympathized Harrison, looking kindly into those blue eyes, washed bluer by the shower—"you are exhausted. We must have a supper. Where shall it be, Westover? Something nice and light, you know."

"No, not too light neither." Angela roused. "I'd rather have something nice and heavy. I like things hot, with lots of gravy. I didn't know I wuz hongry until now." She sank upon a step.

The three were alone in the lobby. This literal confession of animal feeling was appalling. Harrison and Westover exchanged glances. The floor-managers

were extinguishing the lights in the theatre, so the latter said, after a moment of thoughtful silence—

"Do you drive Mrs. Cloud to her boarding-house, Harrison; I will order something from the theatre restaurant, and will join you in a few minutes."

He was starting off, when Angela rang him back with her silver-bell voice.

"Mr. Wustover, steak, if you can get it;" and then, "Oh, Mr. Wustover," as he turned for a second time, "could you get champagne? I wuship champagne."

Westover was gone.

When he appeared in the door of Mrs. Cloud's private parlour a quarter of an hour later, he was brought to a pause by the tableau presented to his eyes. Angela seated in a chair before the grate-fire, at which she was toasting two slippered feet, Harrison stooping in front of her,

holding her long braids by the ends. He wound this gold-coloured cable twice around his throat, and cried, laughing—

"Half of this is quite long enough to strangle me, isn't it? Pshaw! after all, I believe it is too soft for such a purpose."

"Strangle you!" echoed Angela. "Great stars! Mr. Hairrison, I ain't agoing to strangle you; you're lots too nice for strangling. Where would the Mascotte be, if it wasn't for you—for you and Mr. Wustover?"

The gratitude, rude as it was, pleased.

"Right," answered the smiling man, stepping a pace nearer to the smiling girl, and unwinding from his silken noose; "quite right. Let us talk of kissing instead of strangling. Your lips look as if they dreamed of kissing, as if the motion were natural to them in sleep."

A pace nearer; then suddenly and boldly, "Would you kiss me once, Angela, just once?"

The request was never answered. Interruption, in the shape of tinkling glasses, announced the waiter, who now stepped across the threshold of the room; and Westover followed him as if nothing were amiss. Harrison let fall the gold-coloured braid, and moved back, while a flame leaped into his cheek.

"The deuce take it!" he growled to himself; and, moving to the further end of the room, he sat down in a corner.

Westover glanced at Angela. She alone was composed. Perhaps she had not heard the bold request. She seemed tired out; and, as Harrison moved away, she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, while her lips were tenderly pressed together, as if granting to one

another the asked-for kiss, fair jewel of the soul.

Westover, a frown still on his forehead, gave orders to the waiter, and it was not until the explosion caused by the bursting of a cork from the champagne-bottle took place that she roused. Then she opened her eyes, and looked with delight at the frothing liquid firing away out of the bottle in such hot haste.

"Look out!" she cried; "it'll all run away; you'll never be able to keep up with it. You jest ought to see me take a cork out of a champagne-bottle. Prentiss taught me that. I can do it like——"

"Like an artist?" asked Harrison, with a laugh, sitting down with the others to the little feast, as the waiter withdrew.

"Like—like the head waiter at the Hotel Leadville," corrected Angela, with dignity.

She ate and drank with such honest relish; she seemed so grateful. She praised Westover's style in providing the meal with such genuineness, that she restored good humour, and almost smoothed away his frown. She called Harrison "a brick," further described him as a "jolly fellow," and finally asked for a song.

"It's your turn now," she said.

Harrison shook his head negatively, but asked if the recitation of a drinking-song would do. "Some verses of Kenyon's, the prettiest of the kind I know." He raised the goblet, brimming with champagne, to the level of his eye, and examined the dancing rosy sea, embraced within crystal bounds; then, with a bow to the lady, "Shall I quote?"

"What is it—po'try?" asked Angela. "I ain't so vurry fond of po'try; but ef

it's about champagne, I guess it'll be pretty, and I'll like it."

Harrison inclined his head, and quoted—

"Lilies on liquid roses floating,
So floats yon foam on pink champagne.
Would I could join that pleasant boating
And prove the shining main,
Floating away on wine!

"Trust not, the greybeards say, beware,
Whose seashore is the goblet's brim.
Ah! true it is, it drowns old Care;
But what care we for him,
Floating away on wine?

"Ah! true it is, they part in pain
Who sober cross the Stygian ferry;
But only make the Styx—champagne,
And we shall cross right merry,
Floating away on wine.

There you have the essence of the Bacchic," was Harrison's comment at the end of his recitation, as he tossed off his champagne.

Angela had a confused idea that he had said something about backache, and gave

her applause with sleepy reluctance. Westover looked at his watch, and then moved it so that his friend might also see the golden monitor.

"Away with time," laughed Harrison, in reply. "Let us drink to eternity." He poured out more champagne, and dashed into the recitation of a second drinking-song.

Westover stood up, shook his friend by the shoulder, and pointed to the lady. She had floated beyond the reach of champagne or poetry; for, exhausted by the effort of the evening, she was already, true to the laws of healthful nature, finding rest in sleep. It had come about so suddenly, so naturally, that the two men stood awestruck for an instant beside her as she leaned back unconscious; touched by the very helplessness of her situation. Consciousness places a mask over the

human countenance, but sleep withdraws it. In slumber Angela's real self looked out distinctly from her face—that self made up of good humour, innocence, and ignorance. There were the pleasure-loving lines in all their unrestraint.

"Poor child! she is worn out," murmured Harrison.

"Yes, worn out," echoed Westover, also beneath his breath. He puzzled for a moment or two, striving to find a clue to life's mystery in her face-lines.

"She has dimples in her cheek, but they do not show in sleep," was Harrison's half-whispered comment, as he lingered. "The one in her chin is round and deep. Such a face is made for smiles. Such lips——" The sentence ended abruptly, though he could not but mark the lips pouting slightly, as if inviting love's ruby pledge.

Westover turned away, keeping the while his eye on his friend, who followed more slowly. On the threshold of the room, and before passing out, Harrison paused, flung a kiss toward the sleeping lady, and said softly—

"Good night, but not good-bye, Angela."

CHAPTER VII.

HUMAN beings are mirrors, reflecting each the qualities of another. Friends give us back our pleasing qualities; enemies our unpleasing. Friends project upon the mental vision a fair image; enemies, a distorted, exaggerated self, like the grotesque reproductions of a magnifying-glass. We call a friend congenial because the vision he gives us of self is agreeable.

This was not the case with Westover and Angela Cloud. She offended his sense of delicacy constantly, and revolted his sense of honour; but her very weaknesses gave him the opportunity for strength; her

frivolity inspired him with a motive for exertion. Had she possessed inward graces, he might have yielded her the tribute of homage, but not that sparkling gift of sympathy which he now squandered rather recklessly upon her. Her helplessness drew and bound him, like Fenris, the wolf, whom mountains could not hold, but whom a silken thread held fast.

In the beginning of their acquaintance with Angela Cloud, Westover and Harrison had made a compact that neither should see her without the other, as this would hedge her in both delicately and decorously; but, as time went on, Harrison became spasmodic. On occasions he would evince something like interest for the girl; then he would grow suddenly cool, wondering, in this stage of his feelings, over Westover's greater continuity. It then became Harrison's turn to expostulate with

his friend; for when away from Angela he could be prudent, but when in her presence—well, then it was different.

"Are you not shocked by her follies? They grow," he asked one day.

"Great heavens! not so much shocked as saddened," was the answer.

Westover was a man to forget self in his interest in some other human being, such a one as he could help, or such a one as no other person would help. His was an interest caused, not by community of tastes with the transgressor, but by his own rebound in the opposite direction; it was pure, serious, zealous, energetic. He believed that virtues are the vehicle transporting us on our road upward, but that *sins* conquered are mile-stones measuring the distance gained on the road to Paradise. Harrison murmured something about another entanglement.

"Entanglement! That is to be avoided, certainly; for that reason, a man should keep out of her society; but a little interest, advice. She *must* feel responsible to some one; there are people who must walk in leading-strings. You were unfortunate in meeting Angela Cloud, Harrison, because you were intemperate in your admiration of her—and you were also engaged at that time; I am a free man."

"To point your own words at you, Westover, I have heard you say time and again that no man is free."

Westover smiled. "Freedom, like other gifts of the gods, is elastic. Frankly, I am freer than you, old fellow, because less liable to this particular kind of temptation —red lips and yellow hair, etc."

"I see, I see; freedom is elastic enough to slip over your head. The truth is, you are as liable as I to temptation, the only

difference being that it is of another sort. I can't make you out." Harrison drew his sandy eyebrows together and peered at his friend from under them. "I used to believe that you were a socialist; I begin to believe now that you are an anarchist of the worst sort."

Westover shrugged his shoulders, and answered with a dryness that was part irony, part good humour.

"A terrible charge, eh, Harrison? But just answer me this question before you put me into my category. Do order and virtue exist *in* the man, or *in* the institution? Do they exist *for* the man, or *for* the institution?"

Harrison shook his head, laughed, and strode off whistling.

Harrison, as we have seen, was Angela's preference, but in time of need she turned to the more self-contained and sterner of

the two Virginians. One morning she called upon Westover in his office. A view of her troubled face startled him into dropping a huge pile of yellow-enveloped documents, with the words—

"What, in Heaven's name, is the matter?"

"A letter from Prentiss." She laid a crumpled paper before him on the desk, and sank into a chair. "Lillehammer" (Harrison said she used proper names improperly, without their handles)—"Lillehammer sent it to me this morning."

Westover glanced at the following lines:—

"Antonito.

"MR. LILLEHAMMER,

"I hear that you've engaged, as one of your troop, a purson calling herself Angela Cloud. I want you to know that she's my wife, as I can prove. What-

ever business arrangements she makes, I want you to understand, are to be entered into in my name—Robert P. Prentiss, Antonito, Col. Let me know, by return, the turms you have made with my wife, and I will be her agent, etc."

"Well?" Westover raised his brows interrogatively, when he had ended his reading.

"Oh, Mr. Wustover, I'd a sight ruther he'd get ev'ry cent of my money, if he's got to get something, than to get me. Oh, tell me, what shall I do?" She wrung her hands.

Westover leaned back in his leather-cushioned office chair.

"Why are you so afraid of your husband? He seems to be a reckless fellow, it is true, but I do not believe that he would hurt you."

A quiver passed through Angela's frame, and she turned pale—that is to say, the palest pink, her nearest approach to pallor.

"Mr. Wustover, you don't know what Bobby Prentiss is. When I'm with him, I'm that scared. Why, he'd as lief kill me as eat his breakfast; 'deed he would—liefer, when he has his bad fits. Oh, save me from him, Mr. Wustover, you who hev been so kind!"

"I don't think you need mind him." Westover hated sensationalism. He pointed to the letter. "Prentiss only wants to frighten you; that is my opinion."

"But ef he should foller me here—to Denver-r?" Pacing the floor, she beat her bosom with her hand. "I can feel the sharp end of that little crooked Mexican sabr-r-e right in here," she said. "He

keeps it in his belt; I've seen it times and times. He's often played it right under my eyes." She stopped her excited walking and came nearer to Westover in a climax of feminine coaxing; she was so near that he could feel the warm glow of her person. Pressing her lips almost against his ear, she poured out a flood of words, curiously lisped and burred by turns. "Oh, Mr. Wustover, save me from Bobby Prentiss. He isn't like other men; he has crazy fits on him, sometimes oftener, sometimes not so often. He used to say his fingers itched so, he could not keep them off me. He made me promise I wouldn't tell; said if I did he'd blow my brains out, or cut into me with the sabre. Sometimes he goes about with a rifle, sometimes with a sabre. He'd do it too, quick as he would eat his breakfast, when the crazy fits are on him. Please

save me from Bobby Prentiss, do, Mr. Wustover."

She knew how to coax by tear-drops, which broke from her eyes, and, detaching themselves one by one from each other, starred her cheeks with twinkling sorrow. Westover looked grave. She was reaping the punishment of having made the half-mad *braggadocio* a partner of that ride from the convent of Lorette. He drew back gently, and gently disengaged his hand.

"I will write to Mr. Prentiss, if you wish. I will tell him how small your salary is; and I think that Mr. Lillehammer and I together can arrange so that you will have your own to use as your own. Will that do?"

Westover's tone was reassuring, and Angela Cloud was willing to be reassured. She believed that Westover could protect

her against the whole world if he chose, and she let him see that he was to her a sort of providence. Care dismissed, her mood changed. She adjusted her bonnet, her mantle, her gloves; sought, and found, a looking-glass, and made love to her image. Her movements were natural, yet as devoid of true feeling as the most cunning art.

Westover knew that he was frittering his time in sitting two whole hours of a morning, a spectator of a young woman's gambols. But, without rudeness, he could not rid himself of the jocund *prima donna*, to whose supreme egoism it could never occur that she was unwelcome. She liked companionship; she liked to provoke the grave Westover into a smile by means of a tune hummed, a word lisped out, or a peal of laughter. It was too great an effort for her imagination to look upon

time as property, not to be wantonly squandered. The morning had melted before she took her leave; then, with a "Give my love to Mr. Hairrison," and a twitter of song, she flitted out of the dingy office, carrying away with her the sheen of morning sunlight, whose glint was about her.

Westover wanted her to go, yet now that she was gone, his interest in business was gone too. The one sunbeam that shone consumptively through the northern window and fell upon his sheet of office paper made him think of locks of yellow hair. While sharpening his pencil, he was pursued by the desire to sharpen Angela Cloud's wits, and to mend her bad English. He leaned his head upon his hands, and said to himself, after a long reverie, "There are in the world souls and half-souls; the first can be developed—or,

rather, they develop themselves; the last must be—must be watched, warded, guarded with chain, with lock, with key, with will-power—somebody else's will-power; it is their only salvation. Alas for the shipwrecks people make of themselves!" He groaned inly. "What does life mean?" Westover had his answer ready. "Discipline. On the weak it must be enforced; the strong assume it willingly." He strained his fist, and looked at the taut muscles with interest. "The only true birthright is will-power. We cannot choose our bodies, nor our features, nor our temperaments, nor our talents; the sole sphere of choice is right and wrong. I am jealous for my will; I will not yield an inch to the flesh, but all to the spirit, which must and shall choose."

He took out his pile of documents, and set himself to his work; nor did he cease

until the afternoon of a winter day made longer work impossible.

He passed in front of the opera-house, and saw some men standing in front of the flaming advertisements which announced that the "Mascot" was to be given that evening. Catching the words "Ang'la Cloud" pronounced in various keys of the masculine organ, he halted on one side of the advertisement board in order to hear what criticisms were passed upon the other.

"Let's take a box for to-night," said one of the three men, stout, whiskered, shrewd-eyed, a man hardened in prosperity. "The Mascotte is the jolliest little puss ever I see—a *débutante,* you know, goes by the name of Mrs. Cloud, but she has a husband somewhere tucked pretty carefully out of sight, so he doesn't count"—a guffaw, pitched on a bass key. "I'm

int'rested in the little thing," continued the whiskered gentleman, occasionally suppressing a vowel, as if he had not been born to a fine appreciation of the melody of language.

Guffaw, number two, in which the other gentlemen joined, as if they understood how much of a joke it was that their friend should "int'rest" himself in an actress.

"Yes, I wuz for showing her some attentions at first, but it seems some one had got the start of me."

A low murmur greeted this self-depreciation on the whiskered gentleman's part; but he shrugged his middle-aged shoulders, and continued--

"I hate a scene, you know; it's a sight o' trouble. What is it the boys say?—First come, first served; but he must be a reg'lar limb of Satan, that other fellow;

he's got the poor little mouse in his grip, body and soul. She daresn't have so much as a present from no one, not even me."

The speaker buttoned his all-importance into a furred-overcoat with pragmatical self-importance.

"I never do expect to git too old to see a pretty face and enjoy it too. Damn it, if you don't set more store on the joocy" (pronounced *juicily*) "lip, and teensy, tine-sy foot, when you are old than you do when you're young; then you've got more strings to your bow. Come on, gentlemen, let's turn in. I'm goin' to have a left-hand box to-night; that's the side where you can get a view of the Cloud's prettiest dimples." He lowered his voice to a whisper, to be impressive, adding, "I'll bet you anything you like that I can get her to sell me a kiss

from those joocy lips, when the play is over."

The three men passed through the open door of the opera-house, settling the terms of the bet as they went. The man who had spoken was Senator Dowlie, the richest man in Colorado. His words struck Westover as with a blow, accustomed though he was to many a rough customer in the old days of semi-pioneerdom; for they conjured up a hideous vision. Many can stand against misfortune who are overborne unresistingly by prosperity. He mused, anxious and uneasy. Must I let this woman go to the dogs, if she have a mind to go there; or, rather, if others have a mind to send her there, merely to appease this mogul—public opinion? Must I withdraw my influence upon her feeble mind because the world puts a bad construction upon what I do? I do not

wish to meddle with her, Heaven knows—I have had enough of this already; but a human soul is perhaps at stake. If a woman were at hand to take my place and be the providence which this weakling needs; but there is none. The question is urgent. An unguarded moment, an ill-chosen friend——"

Westover shuddered. In his perplexity he had walked away from the town rapidly, and was already beyond the suburb. The evening was turning sharply cold; and a light snow, dry as meal, was driven by a whistling wind. It was sifted in white abundance upon the summit of the mountains that stood, a rampart, on one side; but on the plain it was so slight as to appear like the white cloud blown from a lady's powder-puff. It gave, however, an opalescence to the starless twilight which ran all things into one hue—earth,

sky, air—saving where a dull purplish streak showed the western horizon. He was brought rather suddenly to a pause, on turning a curve in the road that leads mountainward, by the sight of several burros driven by Indians on foot, and a horseman who seemed to be using strong language to them, and who was doubling up his fists fiercely upon the little party. "A cow-boy fresh from the round-up at Ogallala, and come to take his pleasure in the metropolis before starting again upon the range," thought Westover, stepping into the deep shadow of some sage bushes to take a better view of the group. The cow-boy sat in his Mexican saddle woman-fashion; his legs were crossed, his sombrero tilted to the back of his head. He was slim, and wore about his waist a leather belt, beneath which gleamed the nozzle of his revolver. He

was haranguing the two Indians in a voice sweet as honey, but charged with American and Spanish oaths.

Patient stood the sturdy burros under their load of faggots and grease-wood; around them whipped the blast, which they breasted unflinchingly. The Indians were from the Pueblo, and they had walked every foot of the way from a distant mountain valley to do their trading in the metropolis. The elder of the two had a weird aspect of age; his face, hieroglyphed with suffering, was traversed by a thousand wrinkles; huge hollows held his preternaturally bright eyes. He and the lad at his side made a dark spot against the snow-powdered hillsides. The old Indian looked like some antediluvian sheik, staring over blinding reaches of sands. He was an archaic Chaldee in the bosom of the young West grotesque

antithesis, and showing the pathetic love of finery peculiar to the half-civilized. Shags of black bushy hair, interwoven with scarlet worsted and finished off at the ends with fox-tails, overhung either ear; a line of vermilion traversed his forehead and traced the relief of his nose; a dab of blue paint set off his high cheek-bones; his head was surmounted with a stove-pipe hat, as prosaic and as painfully modern as that which graces the cranium of a Wall-Street broker. To the aboriginal, as well as to that child of commercial grandeur, the stove-pipe hat is the choicest touch of elegance. Twilight had still enough of the snow-flare to set forth this ludicrous blending of savagery and civilization.

The conversation was of a hostile nature. The horseman threw himself from his beautifully trained pony, seized a coyote-

skin from one of the pack-saddles, passed his hand luxuriously over its soft fur, and cried out—

"How much, old rascal?"

"Tree dol-lar." In the Indian's countenance lurked a mingling of avarice and simplicity.

"Three dollars!" echoed the highwayman, contemptuously, as he caressed the fur with his cheek and looked at the Indians with a mingling of languor and insolence—"three dollars! Pooh! I can buy in Denver a skin twice as big as this and twice as prutty fur for two dollars, and that's devilish dear."

"I haf' come one hondrid mile," murmured the Indian, plaintively. "I can no go home wis'out my tree dollar."

"Get out," shouted the cow-boy, with brutal humour. "Turn in, you old fox, and let me have this yere skin for one

dollar. No? Seventy-five cents, then? No? Well, fifty, then? Going, going, gone—eh?"

"Na, na," muttered the Indian, in his guttural minor, shaking his head and pointing to the lad who stood at his elbow, not understanding one word of the conversation, but scenting foul play. "Na. Antonito keel zat coyote; he no sell him fo' less zan tree dollar. It take me one week to go home. I gif tree dollar to Immadiana and to leetle Bidal; Immadiana no sell ze coyote fo' less zan tree dollar, leetle Bidal no sell ze coyote fo' less zan tree dollar."

It was vain for the old man to plead wife or little ones. This was not an occasion for sentiment. The coyote was doomed, for in the ethical code of the adventurer it is no crime to rob an Indian.

"Three dollars or no three dollars, Sangre de diavolo, the coyote is mine. I. will hev it, I tell you."

He waved the skin round and round his head, yelling oaths in Spanish and in English; but Antonito, swift as an arrow, darted forward, surprised his adversary, from whose grip he snatched the skin, after which, wrapping it around his meagre little body, the lad made off down the road in the direction of the sage bushes as fast as his legs could carry him. But the cavalier was not to be outdone. He dashed forwards upon the child's tracks, and, after a brief struggle, caught and crushed this slip of an Indian down upon the ground in a sitting posture. Another tussle was needed to force the hide from its owner's grasp, but the task was no easy one, for the youth possessed grip and a power of resistance which made the

breath come short and jerky from betwixt his opponent's set teeth. When the small brown fists yielded at last to the adversary's superior muscle, he opened his mouth so as to show a double range of teeth, for biting is the last resource of the weak. A single nip with those sharp canine teeth drew a howl of rage mingled with pain. Infuriated now, the Mexican made a dive at the coyote's tail, which peeped, in taper plume-like beauty, from under Antonito's arm. A determined wrench, when, pop, off came the tail, and the lad, falling back a pace or two on the rebound, looked down at the mutilated coat still under his arm, his face ghastly with unspoken anger, for emotion blanches rather than reddens the dark-hued races. In silence did he smart under injustice, for this coyote was shot by his own hand, and this was his first booty, which he was bring-

ing to Denver to exchange for precious silver.

"I guess you want a taste of my revolver, eh?" A small sinewy hand of almost feminine delicacy slipped the silver-mounted weapon from the leathern belt, and the slim body placed itself for aim.

The boy stood still in grey-coloured apathy, gazing down at the coyote-skin, but a cry burst forth from the older Indian; and the next moment, with a spring from out the sage bushes, Westover cast himself into the *mêlée.*

"What is your name, sir; and what do you mean by bullying a couple of harmless fellow-creatures on the high-road?"

The man addressed let fall the arm holding the revolver, limp with surprise. Were there others in ambuscade? He looked around stealthily. Taking advantage of the unguarded moment, Westover

leaned forward and slipped the revolver from that small lax hand. When master of it, he said sternly—

"There are times when the revolver enforces etiquette better than a canon of courtesy. In my hands it becomes master of deportment. Do you hear, young desperado?"

"Damnation!" was the answer, breathed in undertone, while a pair of scowling eyes fastened on Westover.

An exchange of glances in silence. Good heavens! they were no strangers, those eyes. After a moment of bewilderment, Westover remembered well that the last time he had seen them they had struck red fire under the glare of a lantern in the station of Alamosa. This, then, was Prentiss, not a cow-boy, turning up like the famous bad penny. But Prentiss did not recognize his adversary. Despoiled

of his revolver, he stood mutely aggressive, his arms folded, a Mephistophelean smile curling upwards his moustaches.

"You are a Mexican. Why not explain that you are only bullying? explain in your own language that you mean no harm." Westover's tones were quietly scornful.

"Speak Spanish with an Indian! What are they?—dogs!" The cavalier shot malice from his eyes, first upon the Indian, then upon his antagonist, after which—"Look here, I am as good an American as you are. I am a citizen of the United States." This is the frontier-man's pride.

"Then behave like one; obey the laws of the United States."

"There's no law 'gainst making what you can out of the Indian devils. I've smelt their blood before now. I can drink

a drop or two, if need be; I know the taste."

"Not so, young man, while I stand by." Westover moved back a pace or two. "If this"—he touched the revolver, firm in his grasp—"if this is not peacemaker, it shall be constable, and see justice enforced. Do you hear?"

"Curse my boots! What do you mean by taking such a high hand with me, eh?"

"Justice begets justice, injustice begets injustice," began Westover, on the alert, with eyes upon Prentiss.

Caution was necessary, for the cavalier made a sudden charge. He threw his lightly knit frame against Westover's breast, hugged him about the neck with one arm, and with the other endeavoured to strain the revolver from his grasp. They struggled blindly for a few seconds,

the Indians standing by, as useless as children.

Prentiss was strong, and he clutched Westover like death around the throat; but the latter was strong, too, and he ripped apart those small straining hands each time that they tightened about him.

"Have a care," he said, panting, in one of these breathing-intervals. "You'll make the revolver go off if you hit about so, and ten to one it will shoot *you*."

"The devil a bit do I care," retorted the desperado, rich in the vocabulary of curses, and he hit about more recklessly than ever. But each of Westover's movements was full of intention, and as he did not waste strength, he gradually made headway, nor did he lose what he gained; and so succeeded at last in freeing himself from Prentiss's grasp, at whose writhing

body and contorted face he looked with an expression of coolness, even curiosity.

"I haven't the least wish to shoot you," he began, keeping hold of the firearm. "I wish nothing but to see justice done to the weak."

"You do, do you," was the taunting answer. "Don't expect me to say thank you. I don't care a toss-up who goes first, you or I. Sangre de Christo! him as has the revolver gets fair play. You've thieved that, or you'd never be let to have the breath for such tall talking. It's just as well, however. I take things as they come, for I'm on my way to Denver, to see my wife. I've got a wife there, the prettiest little woman in Colorado—ha, ha! By Satan, I could not rest easy if I didn't get a good pull at that long hair of hers." He girned at the thought of revenge, and his little hands trembled.

Westover declined to be shocked at his oaths or his threats. He turned to the Indians, now busying themselves with their pack-saddles, and said, still calmly, though his breath came in quickened jerks—

"Come, before we part you must make amends. You have spoiled the skin; you shall buy it and pay them what they ask for it."

"Pay them what they ask for it? Let an Indian make a bargain off of me? I won't do it. The devil take you!" shouted Prentiss, thrusting his hand out as if to seize the weapon.

"Come, come," said Westover, rebukingly, but holding the revolver out of reach, "you know you could not get a coyote skin, even without the tail, than for twice what the Indian asks, in Denver."

Prentiss breathed hard, and looked longingly at his revolver, locked tight in Westover's grasp. The odds were against him.

"I'll give two dollars for the skin without the tail," he answered gloomily.

"Impossible now to separate in your calculations the tail from the rest of the skin; the tail you hold already in your possession as a pledge for the rest."

Both men glanced at the piece of fur lying on the ground.

"Give me my revolver," shouted the Mexican.

"The revolver is yours," pursued Westover, coolly, "as soon as you give the Indian what is his."

This coolness was not without its effect; it cooled down the Prentiss fire. Like most braggadocios, he winced under the tone of authority; for he did not know what

officer of justice he might be discoursing with, and he was one of those adventurers who do not care to have their lives too closely scrutinized. He felt safest when far away from the haunts of men, following, at intervals, his own cattle on the range, or riding over the border to steal his neighbours'; plunging into some rocky canyon to seek adventure, or taking up his abode in some mining camp for wild and reckless gambling.

"I'll be blazed," he said, after a moment's reflection, "if I've got three dollars." He fumbled in a leathern pouch concealed in a breast-pocket, but shook his head. "Can't raise it," he went on conclusively.

"All right," interrupted Westover, with sly sarcasm; "if you haven't got three dollars, perhaps you have *five*."

Prentiss started as if he had been shot through by one of the bullets from his

own revolver. How could another man know that, at the very moment of speaking, his fingers tickled the crisp edge of a five-dollar banknote? Still, at cheating Bobby Prentiss was no tyro; he made one more effort.

"I can't raise it, I tell you, without I trade off my revolver, and the devil eat me if I can swap her."

"Come, it is late," urged Westover, shortly, as if he had not heard this asseveration; "we ought to be getting on our way. Give me that five-dollar note of yours; I'll change it for you."

Coming hoofs hastened Prentiss's sluggish movements. With extreme reluctance he drew forth from his leathern pouch a spick and span five-dollar bill.

"Quick! give me the change," he muttered.

Westover handed some silver pieces to

the old Indian, with a few words of explanation in Mexican patois, which drew a delighted "Gracias a Dios" from him, and sent the little *cortége* moving light-heartedly towards town.

To the marauder he handed a tattered two-dollar note in exchange for the fresh little beauty which he had received the moment before, with these words, "Here is your revolver, charged as it was when I took it from you. See that you make good use of it, Prentiss."

The two men faced each other; and as Westover for the first time let the name of Prentiss fall lightly from his lips, he observed that he had made a great impression upon the borderer, whose eye contracted with a sly look, whose whole person was on the alert. Westover knew that he was at this man's mercy now; but he knew also that the other man feared

him. He stood erect, with folded arms, and, by means of the feeble starlight, gazed full at Prentiss, with eyes that looked him through and through. There was a greyhound thinness about Westover's features, from which overplus of flesh had been chiseled, and this gave them a strength, a keen conscientious beauty which awed. Prentiss quailed under the direct glance.

"Are you surprised that I know your name when you don't know mine? You may well tremble, for I know who you are, and all about you. Did you ever see the inside of a mail-coach?"

Prentiss moved nervously. Westover pursued his advantage, while a smile flashed across his sarcastic features.

"Were you ever hand in glove with a road-agent? You cannot deny that, I see."

"Look here! do you want me to shoot you? We are alone here," interrupted Prentiss, in a husky voice, raising his revolver as if to take aim.

One moment and the mad fellow might have discharged it plump into Westover's breast; but the latter, with a wave of impatience and contempt, said in his quiet voice—

"I am not afraid of you; besides which, why should you get yourself into trouble for nothing? I am not going to take you to justice, as you deserve to be taken, provided only and except that you give Denver a wide berth—do you hear? a wide berth. You have but to approach your wife, and you will find that she has friends who will protect her—plenty of them. Do you hear? give Denver a wide berth."

Westover pointed these words with

steps which, as they approached Prentiss, made the latter to fall back under a spell of fascination.

"Ah! you are one of the friends, are you?" he muttered under his breath.

"Nothing but a well-wisher."

"The devil take you! To me you are an ill-doer, for which I ought to shoot you through that damned insolent skull of yours."

"Promise murder as much as you choose, Prentiss; but yonder stands your pony. Get into your saddle quick, for we are no longer alone. Don't you hear horsemen coming?"

Westover, still advancing, kept Prentiss retreating, until the latter stood by his pony, with his hands on the saddle ready for a spring. He *did* hear a horseman now near, so he vaulted into his seat.

"Tell my wife that I'm coming to Denver soon, anyways; and that if she puts up with your infernal impudence, I'll be there before she knows it—and I'll wring that pretty white neck, too."

"Your wife is nothing to me," Westover vouchsafed answer. "I have no interest in your wife, nor in any woman, for the matter of that, excepting so far as I can protect her. You saw me stand between you and yonder Indian; just so will I stand between you and any other victim—your wife, if need be."

The wind had fallen, the darkness came in great throbs. Prentiss muttered an oath, as if speaking to himself; then, for reply, fired his revolver into the air, and, without waiting to note the consequences, jerked his bridle-rein and galloped off. It was a random shot, easily dodged, after which Westover turned quickly and walked

toward the town. A horseman swept past him. Had the fellow proved refractory, help was at hand, he thought. Was help at hand? The horseman rode fast, and overtook Prentiss, who was as near to being nervous as he had ever before been in his life. He glanced furtively from under the brim of his sombrero to observe this new *compagnon de voyage;* then he threw back his head, gave a low melodious laugh peculiar to him, and held out his hand to grasp the new-comer's.

"Well, Rascal Curley, I'll be derned if you ain't the best friend I've got in the world, and I thought as how you might be the sheriff." This was a joke, which Curley treated as one. "But you was a fool, Curley, not to have come up sooner; we might ha' hed more fun than enough."

"What was up?"

"A passle o' Indians to be licked, and a sassy white man to be griddled. All I wanted was company."

"Well, it's good for my health to lay as big a bit of ground twix me and the town as may be; there's some one a-hanging to the skirts of that place as thinks he's got a score 'gainst me."

"What's you been doing?" demanded Prentiss, with interest, as they galloped abreast.

"Tryin' change o' air for a spell, and change o' okipation. I've been tendin' the little church round the corner, eh?" This last was said with a grim chuckle, as the pair galloped abreast. "I've come out good and square this time; but wot you been doin', Bob?"

"Losin', losin', losin'," repeated Prentiss, gloomily.

"Luck taken a turn?" inquired his

friend, sympathetically. "Well, I've got an odd dollar or two to spare; just call on me, if you're hard up, Bob."

Here was a grotesque sort of generosity, uttered with all the self-confident grandeur of a man who would have the world know that he was successful; but, for all that, it was sincere, and Prentiss knew it to be so. He thrust a muscular embrace upon his friend's hand, saying heartily—

"That I will, you old rascal! I'll be derned ef I don't know where my best friend is."

On galloped the friends far away from Denver, into the grim jaws of night.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was late when Westover reached town, so he went straight to the opera-house. In the lobby were some loafers discussing the new star.

"Have you seen her?" asked one. "They say she's the prettiest woman on the stage."

"Her voice?"

"Her voice? Well, so—so—fresh; the type of the canary."

"Her acting?" The question was put by an Englishman waiting for a favourite aria before taking his reserved seat.

"Her acting is nothing, absolutely

nothing, but a bundle of airs and graces, trippings, steppings, coquettings. Bah!"—with a yawn and puff at his cigarette—"I don't come here to see her act; I come to get a view of the magnificent swell of her bust and the divine taper of her—ah—her legs. Her shoulder and hip vivacity are marvellous." The connoisseur in actresses' limbs threw back his head with a glance effectively *blasé;* the others laughed applause. "By Jeminy," said he of the cigarette, "women ought to be breeded like horses. I can't abide an ugly 'she.' But there's the turkey-song. Psh! the angel is singing now; I hear her. Let's go in."

They went, and Westover also. He felt scorched by hot waves which the Inferno sends whirling through souls; but Angela's pure voice let in upon the flame biting his heart cooling draughts

from heaven. A burst of applause met him at the entrance. Not having a seat, he stood in the corridor, his back against the wall, glancing over the assemblage at the curve of the stage whereon stood Angela in the full glare of the foot-lights, having just ended the turkey-song—that most insinuating of strains. She was in a glow of blushes. Does nature ever cheat? Yes; women's blushes are sometimes badges of the fervour of the blood, rather than of the fervour of innocence.

Many a delicately minded woman deepens yellow instead of red, yet some are dubious about the purity of an inner shrine proclaimed by the yellow rather than the rose-red flag; for worshippers of symbols the blush only, when beautiful, stands for modesty and the sweetly shrinking virtues.

The orchestra preluded an encore,

during which time a floral device, in the form of a turkey, composed of tuberoses and japonicas, was lifted from the left-hand box and pushed forward conspicuously upon the stage by a trio of showily dressed men, who applauded with canes, their mouths admiringly stretched. Westover turned a darkly scornful countenance upon Dowlie and his friends. They had begun their siege; and he said to himself, "We men are by nature hunters; we include fair young girls in the list of legitimate game." But no, his heart shook itself free from the charge; he excluded himself from the universal "we." The *prima donna* was receiving her gift. Prettily? Of course.

She bent over the beflowered monster, plucked a crimson japonica from its framework, fastened it in her bodice, where it glowed, a fiery star; her eyes seemed to

light upon each face in the audience. She touched her heart with her hand, and waved it towards the left-hand box in pantomime of thanks, singing the encore, "I thee more than turkies love." A murmur ran through the audience, stirred easily by deviation from routine and the personal; for the crowd is not given to moralizing: its god is sensation; its rites the spectacular. Five hundred opera-glasses were levelled at the cantatrice. The song finished, she lifted the flower-woven bird to her arms, played with it, smiling and courtseying, when lo and behold! a ring became flashingly visible in its meshes. The flame of the foot-lights struck against gold-encircled gems, suspended to the turkey's beak. Another scene of by-play. The audience, breathless, was absorbed in watching each motion that she made. First, that of surprise, when she first

caught sight of it; then of delight, when, unfastening the ring, she placed it upon her forefinger, despatching at the same time an airy hand-kiss to the left-hand box. Westover would have quailed before that throng of men and women; not so Angela—here did not lie her weakness. At this moment she was in her element; only the tremor of delight ran through her nerves. Abashed? Why? What was freely given, she freely took. The highest and the lowest natures have this in common, that they receive a gift, a benefit, or a favour with absolute simplicity. So there she stood, this winter's favourite, flushed with triumph, twinkling with smiles which went straight to every man's heart, and made him melt to her touching young womanhood. Then, with that sudden flash of thought which sometimes illumines even the dullest intellects, she

sang out the following verse, which she had often sung to her guitar under the apricot trees in the garden of our Lady of Lorette :—

> "I fling thee a kiss, a kiss;
> For what is love but this?
> Its briefness is half its bliss;
> Oh, what is love but a lightsome kiss?"

The song was without prelude, without instrumental accompaniment, and the orchestra was taken by surprise as well as the audience. It was the essence of simplicity. She kept time with her foot, holding her arms as if playing upon the guitar, and simulating its accompaniment to perfection; after which she took up the refrain in a series of melodious whistles, which seemed to come, first from the stage, then from the parquet; from behind the scenes, from the gallery—wherever she wished. Once it burst from the high

gallery as if some music-mad urchin up there were playing echo. It was a feat of vocal gymnastics in which we see often the lower races, or the lower specimens of our own race, excel.

"Good heavens! she actually looks pretty whistling," said one. "Her cheeks are peaches, her lips cherries!" "What skill! What control of breath! How beautiful! Make her do it again!" resounded from different parts of the house; after which a burst of applause was sent billowing from right to left and from left to right of the theatre, with prolonged whistles from the gallery, and a clatter of canes from the left-hand box, whose occupants were in glee.

"Is this success?" asked Westover of himself, when the curtain fell at the close of the act. "Is anything more transient or more dangerous? It makes

the strong delirious; how will it serve the weak?"

The "Angel," as little Mrs. Cloud was called, owed to Westover and Harrison the wings which enabled her to mount into this heaven of fame, or notoriety, whichever it might be. They had the habit of going to the opera-house on the nights when she sang, to warn her of errors of manner and other imperfections; so that by turns the awkward posture, the hoydenish movement, had been corrected, and their *protégée* was the lovelier for the lesson. With woman's instinct, she was anxious to please, therefore amenable to influence in externals. One might have fallen into the error of supposing that she was inwardly mouldable, ready to shape herself to the wishes of the chosen mentor; but this was not so, for Angela, with all her outside softness, was inwardly of a

fatal hardness, a pitiless inflexibility. As to her possibilities for improvement, Westover still stood upon the borderland of doubt. Harrison, with his superior knowledge of women, hit off the truth much more clearly—that is, when he was not in the presence of the lovely creature, who had the trick of smiling away his doubts; for he had said you could no more mould her than you could the running brook; beneath the shimmering surface lies the current which, in the human, is its fatality. Intelligent change is strength, growth, evolution, it affects the immortal part; mere surface adaptability is a shifting to suit circumstances, an expedient toleration of environments. It is not thought, it is convenience; plants and lower animals possess the accommodating faculty. Against art Angela was powerless; she adored kisses,

caresses, and flattery, against which she had no power of resistance. Within the convolutions of the girlish bosom there lay only a rudimentary heart, an embryo, what the scientific man calls "an inherited tendency."

As Westover looked up after these soliloquizings, he perceived Harrison coming along the corridor towards him. The smiling blue eyes quickly singled out the friend among the black-coats that swarmed in the pass-ways, making the most of the brief recess of the *entr'acte.*

"Wasn't she divine?" cried Harrison, the first to speak, his holiday expression set off by the *ciel-bleu* cravatte he wore, and the spray of white jasmine in his button-hole. "Wasn't she divine? Lillehammer is dead certain that you and I are speculating in her voice; it wouldn't be a bad idea. She's a catch."

Westover's answer was a forefinger pointed to the left-hand box, deserted now by its occupants, who might be already behind the scenes making friends with the accessible Angela, for all that these southern dons knew.

"I see; I see. Dowlie's a tiger." Harrison's holiday countenance changed to a fast-day expression.

"If she is not protected by somebody to-night, they will get a start; and Dowlie's acquaintance, his friendship means—you very well know what," said Westover, thinking of the girl's narrow escape from Prentiss, and yearning to save her from greater harm.

"I have an engagement just now," began Harrison, "or I would be on hand; but you are alone, Westover, and at liberty, look after her to-night by all means."

Westover gave his friend an inscrutable look; then, glancing with a twinkle at the flower in his friend's button-hole, he said—

"Oh, the smell of that jasmine flower! eh?"

"Exactly," was Harrison's assent, and he laughed also, for Westover was always twitting him about his love-affairs. "The fact is, I have brought Miss Steptoe to the opera, the first time she has been well enough to be out at night. Knew my mother in Virginia, you know, so of course I must do the polite. You must attend to the chaperoning of the divine Angela by yourself this time."

As Harrison handed the "divine Angela" over to his friend for chaperoning, the curtain rose for the last act, and he returned to his place to "do the polite" to Miss Steptoe.

The opera concluded, Westover turned into one of the lobbies. As he had expected, there stood the heroes of the left-hand box, talking noisily. Already had they lighted their cigarettes, and one of them, with a chuckle, exclaimed—

"Well, you've got your bet, Senator Dowlie. By Jove, she's a pretty little devil!"

"I'll pit her against the best of 'em," was the old stager's unenthusiastic rejoinder.

He was not a man to be green even in his raptures. The choice trio had been betting upon woman-flesh, instead of horseflesh; this was evident, and they, like Westover, were awaiting a glimpse of the little beauty, when she should make her exit.

Westover was not a man to waste time. After searching for the entrance, he suc-

ceeded at last in pushing his way through the half-open door which gave admission to the part of the theatre used only by the actors; and, after threading the gloomy labyrinth, he emerged into a spacious apartment, dimly lighted and insufficiently heated by a huge stove, around which there hung a group of men warming their hands. The twilight dimness, the confusion of voices as well as of figures, bewildered Westover for an instant; but his eyes soon became accustomed to the sombre tone of this Hogarth picture, and he stood still, looking round for the object of his search. Figures were coming in and going out, but not Angela's. Two of the men who were warming at the stove glanced up indifferently as a faded blonde —the second soprano—made her way between them with the words—

"Get out o' the way, Riley, will you,

or you'll mash my bokay." She held up her trophy of the evening, a bouquet of tuberoses, whose blossoms, having been beheaded and wire-spiked, were jaded like their owner. She held their tinfoiled stems tight, and pressed the wilting things to her nostrils with pathetic exultation. "This bokay is going straight home to my youngster; she always asks me every night, 'Ma, did you get anything?' She'll put them in water, and you ought to see how they'll live. Dying things will live a heap longer if there's any one to care for 'em."

The second soprano sighed as she discharged this piece of moralizing, for her day was over; once she had been flattered too, like the new *prima donna*, but now her only triumph was a bunch of withered tuberoses.

The men at the stove paid little heed

to her. One of them, with side-whiskers, shrugged his shoulders, as he said—

"What's flowers to make a fuss over? give me a champagne supper. We made a good score to-night, Dugan; we ought to do it up brown and treat."

"Done!" agreed a smooth-faced man, the most gentlemanly looking of the party. "There'll be us two and Ang'la Cloud, of course; who'll make the fourth?"

They glanced expressively over the hall, for the "treat" was to be exclusive, and confined to the aristocracy of the Mascot's troup.

A bevy of women, chorus-singers, now scattered through the apartment, which seemed the outlet of various smaller lobbies. They were chattering like sparrows in a high shrill key, and Westover caught fragments of their talk, such as "Wasn't he a gra-an-d feller, the one

with the black curly hair? I could smell jockey-club from where I stood whenever he took out his pocket-handkerchief."

Westover smiled. Jockey-club! Dowlie did smell of it, figuratively as well as literally. He was saturated through and through with it. But why did not Angela come? Westover peered uneasily into the dim vistas, and was on the verge of questioning one of the chorus-singers, who had lingered behind the others, when suddenly, as if a daffodil-flame of morning light had streamed into the close place, she came in at last, smiling, gathering about her shoulders a wadded cloak. Quick as the tongue of fire, he was at her side, before the loungers at the stove could even see her.

"Why, Mr. Wustover!" was all she said, as she stepped back a pace, her face turning blank.

This ejaculation caught the attention of the other men, and Riley, the tenor, came forward.

"What is the matter?" he asked, a spark of hostility in his bold black eye. "Is any one troubling you, my dear?"—looking as if he were quite ready to knock down a troublesome intruder.

Westover and the tenor eyed each other, and then both eyed the girl. She flinched under the double pair of eyes, but it was the pair belonging to Westover that troubled her most.

"Is any one troubling you?" reiterated the tenor, more insolently than before.

"N—o," was breathed feebly from Angela's lips.

She had an uneasy sense of antagonism between the two men, and she felt all power of action slipping away from her. She was suffering that collapse which a

patient experiences in the hands of a mesmerist. Her bosom rose and fell with a long shuddering sigh, though Westover had not spoken a single word.

"All right. If any one worries you, just remember I'm here."

The glance which the tenor cast upon Westover had a threat in it. He turned on his heel, sauntered toward the stove, from which vantage-ground he kept Westover within the field of vision.

"Angela"—Westover pronounced her Christian name in the gentlest of tones. To resist the imperious tone is easier than to resist the gentle—"Angela, danger is abroad; you need protection. Trust me, come with me; won't you? You have done your part for to-night, and done it well. Leave this place, these people, and let me take you home."

"He is only the tenor." Angela

fluttered as she said this plaintively, for she had found the tenor friendly, and she would not have minded tarrying awhile in his society.

"Ah! then you do not wish to come?"

Westover's change of manner, his incisive voice and glance, alarmed the girl, whose bosom palpitated with vague fear of she knew not what.

"N—yes, I do; 'deed and 'deed, I do." She dared no more oppose him than the willow branch the west wind.

"Then come, and let us go quickly."

He laid his hand upon her arm so as to guide her toward the rear of the building. He wished to discover a private exit, so as to avoid Dowlie's roistering party, whom frequent tippling during the *entre-acte* had raised to the verge of aggressive impudence. Her drapery rustled as she moved forward. The tenor, hearing the

silken sound, turned quickly, and started out of his lounging posture with the words—

"What! Not going, Mrs. Cloud? We're counting on you, Dugan and I, for the fourth in a champagne-party. It's got up for your benefit; can't do without you, positively. We don't often get a chance to lark such a nightingale."

Riley possessed the accomplishment of cheap wit. Dugan laughed. Westover leaned against the corner of a side-scene and frowned, but opened not his lips.

"I see what's up," continued the tenor, hurried by circumstances out of his company grammar. "You're abeing forced, and I ain't agoing to stand by and see it. Do you hear me, there, you Mr.—Mr.——?"

"Westover," suggested the owner of that name, coolly.

"Westover, or whatever it is, I won't stand by and see a poor weak woman forced into what she don't want," said the tenor, surlily, but somewhat abashed by Westover's coolness.

"Do I force you?" Westover moved a few paces away from Angela and faced her.

"No-o, no-o; I'd ruther go with you—than stay here with Riley and the rest."

But there was a catch in the voice which pronounced the words "go with you," for, though Angela clung to Westover with tenacity, still she was a woman, and she would like to have had her way.

"I ain't agoing to have it. Any fool can tell from your looks that you're 'fraid to say your soul's your own." Riley shook his long, loose-knit figure, aggressiveness in every movement. "What right's this man got to be ord'ring you 'round,

cheating you out of a champagne-supper, if you're a mind to hev one?"

"He isn't cheating me. He doesn't know how to cheat. He isn't or'dring me; he's a gentleman, and there's no other gentleman in the world like him. Go ahade, Mr. Wustover; I'll walk acrosst the roof ef you say so."

Angela took destiny into her own hands by one of the rare impulses bespeaking the better nature. She was willing enough to cling to virtue when virtue was easy, but she knew not how near were her words to prophecy. She held her hand toward Westover with that look of appeal which stirred him to white heat, and made him feel as if a spirit were calling upon him for aid. She lifted her eyes with the look of hunger in them which children and animals and helpless beings have. It was as if a starving thing were gazing

out of their lucid depths, praying to him for sustenance.

"Come," was Westover's sole answer. Meeting Riley's defiant look with one of cool composure, he made a gesture for her to follow him.

"Sweethearts, eh? How was a fellow to know that?" muttered the conquered tenor, falling back a step or two.

Westover and his charge turned an abutment of stage-scenery. Weakness finds its correlative in temptation; and where moral tension was necessary, Angela was a quaking reed. It is said that if Shakespeare entered a room, every one in it would rise; if Christ, every one would kneel, so communicable is spirit; at this moment, Westover's softened, in Angela, to a fascinated docility: she followed, trembling.

"Rest a second," he said, placing her

upon a chair discarded from the theatre's paraphernalia and half buried in the cobweb of this remote corner. "I will see where we are." He tried several doors; one yielded. "This leads outside," he said carelessly, leaving it ajar, and advancing to offer her his arm.

"Where are we, Mr. Wustover?" she gasped, a moment later, as they stood on the iron balcony outside.

An iron staircase, steep and narrow, led to the street below; but, oh horrors, to go down would be like a descent into eternity. She lifted her head—the sky was one dim grey sheet; she bent her head—the world beneath was a dim grey expanse, like another sky, except for the buildings that shot upward dark blocks of stone, but they too were ribbed with snow. She touched the railing; it was hard with ice. She moved her feet up and down tenta-

tively upon the open-work floor of this aërial balcony; then shuddered and shrank back, lifting to Westover a face blanched with fear.

"Where are we?" she cried sobbingly, as if under the power of some appalling nightmare.

"We are on the fire-escape," he answered, and pulled the door to after him. "Fortunately for us, it was left open."

"Let's go back!" cried Angela, clinging convulsively to her companion's arm.

"We can't now," returned Westover. "The door is latched. See!"

He tried the door to satisfy her; it would not yield. They were locked out, but suspended, so it seemed to Angela, in the midst of a world of darkness and of danger. Midnight sounded from the City Hall, and every drop of her blood turned to ice. She could not

stand unaided. Westover threw his arm around her, and its warmth communicated strength.

"Shall we go down?" he asked quietly, as if there were nothing unusual in this strange midnight descent from a fire-escape.

"I'm 'fraid; I'd fall, sure." Her knees tottered.

"It is imagination," returned Westover, soothingly. "If there had been a fire in the theatre to-night, you would have been thankful to trust yourself to this stair-case; so would every one else. Just fancy all the actors and actresses going down, and you will not be so much afraid."

Angela thrilled to his gentle tone. "Go ahead," she said falteringly. "I said as how I'd follow you anywhere, even on the roof."

Westover took a step on the slippery

stairs, then turned to see how his companion promised. She also took a step, clutching nervously at the rimy rails.

"Good," cried Westover, cheerfully; "that is a beginning. The next step will be easier."

But the next step was no easier; it was taken in fear and trembling.

"Don't look down," advised Westover, as they proceeded, still in his cheery voice. His spirits rose in an emergency. "Don't look anywhere except at my coat. If you should fall, it would only be against my shoulder; and that would not be far, would it?"

But Angela was past answering. Her limbs refused to bend; they could convey her no further. She sat down on the step and looked around in despair. Her strength was spent. Westover looked at her anxiously. They were not very far

from the bottom. He placed himself quick as thought on the outer side next the rail, which he grasped with one hand; then threw the remaining arm around her. In this way they took more steps, Westover discovering that his burden grew heavier, not lighter. With one swift snatch, he lifted her in his arms, cleared the remaining steps, and placed her on the cobble-stones of the street. The sense of danger gone, he felt a trifle embarrassed by the romantic aspect of the escapade. Carriages still shot up and down the thoroughfares; but as, fortunately for them, they had made their exit upon a side street, they were screened from observation.

"I was always giddy in the head," was the lady's apology, as she glanced with admiration touching upon awe at the flight of steps she had descended.

"Here, take my arm," proposed West-

over, hurriedly, hearing footsteps coming in their direction, and desiring to be released from what must appear a very absurd position.

Another instant the steps were close upon them, and "Westover!" "Harrison!" was the interchanged greeting.

"Oh, Mr. Hairison, you've come too late to see the show! It was the tragedy after the farce this time. Do you know, I like to broke my neck; but Mr. Wustover carried me. Oh, the times and times I've said he was a sure-enough saint!"

Westover chafed under this garrulity.

"Carried you?" fairly screamed Harrison—"carried you? Where?"

"Why, down the fire-escape. We've only just come down, you know." She lifted her head for another look at the dangerous stair-way—a cobweb in the snowy midnight, the relic of a dream.

Harrison, of course, did not know. He appealed to his friend, receiving confirmation of Angela's statement.

"Well"—to Westover—"if you are not the most romantic fellow that ever walked on top of this earth!" Lowering his tone so that Angela, who was brushing snow from her mantle, should not hear, "Who wants caution now?"

"It is my caution that has played the prank," was Westover's half-laughing reply. "Appearances are against me, I admit, for extremes will meet. But, to avoid further imprudence, we must get away from here in a hurry. Mrs. Cloud, you will catch your death of cold."

"If she has not caught it already. I wonder, Westover, that you take note of such matter-of-fact things as colds."

Westover did not retort; but, instead, settled the *prima donna's* wadded mantle

more snugly about her shoulders; while she leaned forward, laughing, to protest.

"Colds? They shake off from me like dust. Is here any sign of cold? Gob-ble, gob-ble." The musical doublets were as pure as those of the patron saint of music.

Harrison could not detect the smallest frivolity in Westover's manner when touching that wadded mantle; there was only the calmness of interest, which might have been bestowed upon the merest stranger.

"Good night," rang out his clear voice. "Good night," trilled the girlish one; and Harrison saw his fantastic friend and Angela's splendid nullity disappear around the corner.

Flirtation had been from boyhood up, to Harrison, what fancy work is to women —the recreation of an idle hour, and many

of Harrison's hours were idle. What were fine eyes for, if not to be smiled into? If the rose is made for smelling, are not lips for kissing? In his susceptibility lay his weakness; but therein also lay his strength. He had never received from one bright eye a wound for which he could not find medicine in another; but the cure for flirtatiousness is a grand passion, and Harrison's friends thought him under the spell of such a one now. "This time," they said, "he is in earnest—in love with a plain-looking woman, in the bargain. Who would have thought to see Harrison caring for a sick woman, an invalid come to find health among the Rockies—one who almost coughs herself to death, and has hollows in her cheeks? Inconsistency, thou art no longer woman, but man!"

The next evening Harrison was at Miss Steptoe's. She was inquisitive about his

friend—interested, she called it—and said—

"Ah, Mr. Harrison, I tremble for that noble, distinguished-looking friend of yours. He is one of the men who become victims to their theories." She bent forward. "Promise me that you will take care of him."

"Oh, he can take care of himself!" was the careless reply; for Harrison was thinking at that moment more of this lady's nervously working invalid hands, and of the dangers which beset her delicate frame, than of those which beset Westover.

"Ah! don't you see, that is just what he cannot do. Such men never take care of themselves. It is the fearless swimmers that are drowned."

"But the girl is married. Her husband, though a villain, is the safeguard."

Miss Steptoe shook her head.

"But, Miss Fanny, Westover is a man of honour."

Harrison reddened in his friend's behalf. Miss Steptoe's thin cheek repeated this blush, only much more faintly; but she answered with the firmness habitual to her—

"There is the danger. Because this girl is married, he will think himself and her safe, knowing his own intention to be pure."

"Where women are concerned, there is always danger, I suppose," muttered Harrison.

Miss Steptoe was using the arguments which Harrison himself had used; but loyalty to his friend made him constrained to oppose them when uttered by a woman, who, however dear to him, was as yet almost a stranger to Westover.

"The danger for a man is nothing like

so great where he is merely caught by a woman's physical beauty, as you said you were at first by this same Angela Cloud's; but the danger is great where a man is bewitched by the desire to elevate, to improve, her, as Mr. Westover is. His interest will grow daily. He will be for ever on the watch for the new development, in an ecstasy of hope that she will ripen into perfection. Tell me, then, may not interest like this deepen insensibly, insidiously, into love?"

"I am afraid that you are right." Harrison was forced to admit the lady's delicate divination of the difficulties of that position from which he so wisely had withdrawn, but in which Westover still stood.

"It would pain me, Mr. Harrison, more than I can tell, if Mr. Westover should absorb his glorious manhood in that shallow, ordinary girl's life; but men do

those things now and then. Stand by your friend; stand between him and that horrible future which fate seems preparing for him. Do you know, when I looked at you and Mr. Westover standing together on the top of the Argentine Pass, where we first met, I said to myself, 'That man has the shadow of doom resting upon him.' When his countenance brightened, it was only to relapse into a deeper shadow. You were bright and joyous, but he was sombre and melancholy; you attracted me by your jokes, and they revived me; but he fascinated me by the dash of irony which cut into his speech. He spoke rarely, but I found myself listening for those words; few as they were, they were often bitter, but they nerved my spirit like the stinging drops of a tonic. I shall never forget that journey over the Argentine Pass. I was in search of scenery and health; you and

Mr. Westover were in quest of some mountain town—I forget the name."

"Bonito," was Harrison's laconic answer, and he gazed upon the invalid with a slight frown upon his usually open brow. "If you were to see much of my friend Westover, I should have to say, 'Good-bye, Hope,'" he said, with the accent of reproach.

Somehow this fragile girl was winding herself into his heart with the subtlest force. Her answer was hindered by a fit of coughing, which prevented further conversation that evening. As Harrison watched her slender frame shaken by the paroxysm, his expression of reproach changed to one of anxiety.

"You have found scenery among the Rockies, and health too, I think, Miss Fanny. You are certainly stronger than you were."

Harrison made an attempt at cheerfulness. Miss Steptoe smiled faintly between her fits of coughing, and nodded an affirmative; speech, however, was still impossible, so he rose to take his leave, holding out both his hands to her, with the words—

"Your admiration for my friend is well placed; jealousy in me would be treason. You could not see him without admiring him, nor know without liking him, heartily, as I do; but Westover is not a man to take advice, Miss Fanny. He considers me everything that is rash, and himself everything that is prudent."

Miss Steptoe recovered speech. "You may be excitable, even fickle, and I think you have a sprinkle of sentimentality, Mr. Harrison; but Mr. Westover is a thousand times more capable of being rashly romantic than you; besides which, the girl

needs a friend, and she is simply exquisite to look at." Miss Steptoe manifested some shyness, but the eyes that looked at Harrison were penetrating.

Harrison laughed impatiently, answering, "You have altogether too high an opinion of Westover."

Over his cigar that night he mused, "Men don't usually do things like these for mere benevolence, or philanthropy, or whatever they call it; he must have some ulterior motive. And yet I'll be willing to take my oath that I've never yet seen the man like him; he's always wanting to suffer in the place of somebody else—the person never makes any difference. It's the suffering he cares for; the abstract quality. I have seen him put himself out more for an animal than most men would for another man. By Jove! she's not worth all the trouble he takes for her. But that's

the style of woman, they say, that get the help from men; women who are worth anything help themselves, I suppose. I remember hearing some one say once that every other passion is a mere child to philanthropy when *that* does grow into a passion. I am inclined to believe it is true; a man will sacrifice self, friends, kindred, all for it, if it once possess him. I hope Westover isn't benevolence-bitten; he's too nice a fellow to be spoiled. I'll stake my honour as a gentleman on one thing, though, and that is, he is pure—pure as the driven snow; but for all that, I think I'll watch him. How Miss Fanny does admire him from a distance! One would say they were made for each other, but they are not; I intend to have her for myself. She is the only woman I have ever seen fit to anchor my roving heart. She is not pretty nor fascinating, yet

somehow I love her as I have not loved before."

Harrison was one of those men who confess openly that the new-fangled bore called "mankind" is as great a plague as the old-fashioned nuisance called a "soul." Westover called him a comedian when he uttered such sentiments, and Miss Steptoe a sceptic; but the time had not yet come in his life when he should stir inwardly and outwardly. A woman was needed to give the strings of his conscience a tug; and that woman had as yet but gently touched his heart-strings, merely preluding with the first faint chords the diapason destined to follow.

END OF VOL. I.

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